

THE ART OF FAITH IN A WORLD OF PROGRESS:  
FROM TRANSCENDENCE TO IMMANENCE  
(VOLUME I)

David Wilson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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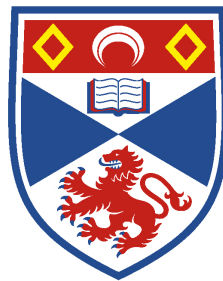
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The Art of Faith in a World of Progress: From  
Transcendence to Immanence.  
(Volume 1)

David Wilson



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the  
Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews

September 2016

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## Abstract

This thesis examines what the visual art of Christian faith might reveal, and teach us, about the living art of faith in a world characterised by progress. The argument focuses on two prominent visual artists from the nineteenth century - William McTaggart (1835-1910) and William Dyce (1806 – 1864) - and two late twentieth century painters: Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) and Peter Howson (b. 1958).

The principal contribution then, of the thesis is the sustained analysis of works of art as sites of religious meaning; works that do not simply reflect or echo their contexts (although this is clearly the case) but also, through the particular, may transform our understanding of those contexts and, in terms of the art of faith, may prophetically offer new ways of relating to faith in times in which faith is challenged in various ways. After setting the scene with a substantial treatment of the tensions in Victorian society (Chapter 1), the thesis then builds its arguments through close interpretations of the works of William McTaggart (Chapter 2) and William Dyce (Chapter 3) in the central part of the thesis. In Chapter 4, the argument moves to the contemporary. After a short introduction to the secularism, or unattached belief, arguably characteristic of modern Britain (4.1), the thesis presents a close analysis of Andy Goldsworthy (4.2) and Peter Howson (4.3). In the conclusion, I set up a comparison between these two contemporary Scottish artists and their Victorian forbears.



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I express my warmest thanks, however, to all members of my family - Yvonne, Catherine and James - who have given up so much in order that I might fulfil this promise.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines what the visual art of Christian faith might reveal, and teach us, about the living art of faith in a world characterised by progress. The argument focuses on two prominent visual artists from the nineteenth century - William McTaggart (1835-1910) and William Dyce (1806–1864) - and two late twentieth century painters: Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) and Peter Howson (b. 1958). The Victorian era was a period of particular transition and progress<sup>1</sup>, which manifested, in many ways, the challenges posed to Christian faith<sup>2</sup>. It also still informs, in many ways, the cultures of advanced modernity, and the late twentieth, and early-twenty-first centuries are arguably characterised by an even faster pace of progress than in late-nineteenth century, industrial Britain. In analysing two periods, I wanted to keep a constant; in this case, all four of the artists under consideration are Scottish painters. As their religious influences, and beliefs, are very different and emerge from different Christian traditions, this thesis gives a sense not only of the spiritualities of Victorian and modern Britain but, more specifically, of the Scottish context. The aim of the thesis, however, is not only to see how these artists were informed by particular religious contexts but, more importantly, to show how these artists offer new, and more nuanced perspectives on these contexts and religious outlooks through their paintings.

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<sup>1</sup> The Victorian Era was known as the ‘the age of energy and the age of industry; the age of reform in politics and social class status, along with the reform of a woman’s role; the age of empire; the age of reading; and the age of self-scrutiny’. David Danrosch, *The Longman Anthology of British Literature, The Victorian Age*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 2B. (New York: Longman Publishers for Pearson Education, 2006), 1102-1117.

<sup>2</sup> With regards religion the Victorian era has often been called the ‘age of doubt’. This sentiment can clearly be seen in the writing of much poetry centring on the crises of faith including: ‘Dover Beach’ by Matthew Arnold and ‘God’s Grandeur’ by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The principal contribution, then, of the thesis is the sustained analysis of works of art as sites of religious meaning, works that do not simply reflect or echo their contexts (although this is clearly the case), but also, through the particular, may transform our understanding of those contexts and, in terms of the art of faith, may prophetically offer new ways of relating to faith in times in which faith is challenged in various ways. After setting the scene with a substantial treatment of the tensions in Victorian society (Chapter 1), the thesis then builds its arguments through close interpretations of the works of William McTaggart (Chapter 2) and William Dyce (Chapter 3) in the central part of the thesis. In Chapter 4, the argument moves to the contemporary. After a short introduction to the secularism, or unattached belief, arguably characteristic of modern Britain (4.1), the thesis presents a close analysis of Andy Goldworthy (4.2) and Peter Howson (4.3). In the conclusion, I set up a comparison between these two contemporary Scottish artists and their Victorian forbears.

The exploration of religious outlook is enormously complex, particularly during periods characterised by rapid change in received opinions, and by a huge variety of religious perspectives. In providing an initial framework to explore the tensions in Victorian Britain which I suggest resurface in interesting ways in the contemporary context, I have used the paired terms of ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’<sup>3</sup>; a first working definition may be helpful here. As the entry in the Oxford English Dictionary indicates, emphasis on ‘transcendence’ tends to suggest, in religious terms, a God existing ‘beyond and independent of the universe’ whereas a privileging of ‘immanence’ implies that God is

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<sup>3</sup> This tension, between the paired terms of immanence and transcendence, was implicit in many of the religious debates in Victorian Britain this; included the 1858 Bampton Lecture, presented by The Very Reverend Henry Mansel, on reason and revelation: *The Limits of Religious Thought*.

seen more as ‘present and dwells in or within a person or thing’<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, I apply these twin terms to religious art in the following way: ‘transcendence’ may embody a relationship between the artist and the divine where God is experienced as majestic, other, beyond that which could normally be experienced and at specific moments of revelation; ‘Immanence’, by contrast, may suggest a close relationship between the artist and the divine where God is experienced in the everyday, the mundane, and is willing to be affected by the world and human subjects.<sup>5</sup> Of course, these are but working definitions to provide an initial framework, and my argument is that the works of art, let alone the periods in which their artists produced them, complicate any precise definition of this kind.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the thesis with an extensive exploration of the tensions in Victorian Britain. These tensions are highly complex but seem to pervade every aspect of nineteenth century society. I highlight these tensions by bringing into focus those who embraced progress and those who supported regression;<sup>6</sup> an initial working definition of these two terms might now be helpful. With respect to the entry into the Oxford English Dictionary the word ‘progress’ can refer to ‘a series of actions, through time, to a stage of advancement’, whereas the privileging of ‘regression’ suggests ‘a process of returning to an earlier

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<sup>4</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online version [oed.com](http://oed.com).

<sup>5</sup> Various cultural ambassadors, in the nineteenth century, embraced the principles of transcendence or immanence including: Henry Parry Liddon and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Liddon, as the Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral, would attract large crowds where in his sermons he would affirm a transcendent God who was high, lofty and beyond human comprehension. Henry Parry Liddon, *Sermons Preached on Special Occasions: 1860–1889 Sermon XIV* “Teaching and Healing”. [www.anglicanhistory.org.uk](http://www.anglicanhistory.org.uk). From a different perspective Hopkins appears to embrace moments of immanence in his poetry, including: *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. Oscar Williams, *Immortal Poems of the English Language*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1952), 465.

<sup>6</sup> Many welcomed the ideals of progress including: Edward Bulwer Lytton, *England and the English* 1833, ed Standish Meacham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). On the other hand many looked to the past for a sense of comfort and stability: Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy, *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, (London: Ashgate, 2008).

stage; a reversion towards a former state’<sup>7</sup>. In this thesis, I apply these terms in the following way: ‘progress’ may be regarded as a number of events that give rise to a feeling of advancement to a higher state or a condition of improvement, invariably these events generate a atmosphere of ‘change’; ‘regression’, by contrast, looks back to a previous moment in history with an impression that things were better in the past, an ‘ideal’ moment in history. This looking backwards might engender feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality. I then suggest that there is often an interesting overlap between progression and regression in the social-political sphere and immanence and transcendence in relation to religious sensibility. The chapter provides a substantial examination of the tensions at the heart of Victorian society and how these express themselves through the many facets of nineteenth century life.

After an overview of Victorian Britain, I re-affirm the proposition that nineteenth century life was essentially one of progress with a conservative reaction. In politics progress was linked to the ideals of free trade and the philosophy of laissez-faire<sup>8</sup>. With regard to economic progress, this was defined in the move away from agricultural to a manufacturing economy where Britain held the dominant economic status<sup>9</sup>. This economic success fuelled the ideals of the cult of progress but there were many that longed for the ancient regime... when life was simpler<sup>10</sup>. Turning to society, it was seen as dynamic and changing where the new wealth of the manufacturing classes mixed with the aristocracy

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<sup>7</sup> Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online version [oed.com](http://oed.com).

<sup>8</sup> Free Trade: The Corn Laws were a protectionist measure from the Napoleonic period that had served the landed aristocracy well by keeping their wheat sales safe from cheap foreign competition. The Corn Laws were disliked by many because they increased food prices and therefore necessitated paying workers higher wages. On a more philosophical level protectionism offended the manufacturers and men of commerce whose dissent went into the making of the first modern ‘interest group’ called the Anti-Corn Law League (1839) under the leadership of Richard Cobden and John Bright.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: the Economic History of Britain 1700 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 1983), 230

<sup>10</sup> The ancient regime was an idealised period of British history (1688-1832) where the state inspired a sense of paternalism at a local level.

and there was a belief that poverty would be abolished through ‘self-help’. Yet, many looked back with nostalgia to an agrarian based society where the local parish cared for the simple poor.

Due to the fact that this thesis is contemplating visual art, a major section of the chapter is concerned with the tensions at the heart of Victorian cultural life. In this survey these tensions are deliberated with respect to literature, music, architecture and art. Architecture proved to be very fruitful with regard to the discussion between the progressive ideals of Victorian Britain and the constant search for a moment in history that was regarded as the ideal. Consequently, we witness that in the building of the new Houses of Parliament, the very symbol of protestant imperial power and wealth, we have a neo-gothic architectural design that yearns for medieval antiquity<sup>11</sup>. The section on religion also has a dominant position within the chapter and two features of the Victorian Church are explored in equal measure. First, the Church of Scotland, with special reference to the Disruption of 1843, is examined<sup>12</sup>. Second, the Oxford Movement is studied with specific mention given to moments in church history when the Movement believed the Divine communicated His will; the early Church Fathers; the Restoration of the Catholic King, Charles II, and the Caroline Divines<sup>13</sup>. Finally, the chapter investigates the relationship between science and religion; science was regarded as one of many attacks upon religious belief, particularly with regard to the interpretation of the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2<sup>14</sup>. Accordingly,

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<sup>11</sup> This tension is highlighted in: Rosemary Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain*, (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> The Disruption of 1843 was a schism within the established Church of Scotland where 450 ministers broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland.

<sup>13</sup> The Oxford Movement began in the early 1830s with a perceived attack by the reforming Whig administration on the structure and revenues of the established church in Ireland. Keble attacked the Irish Church Temporalities Bill (1833) in his Assize Sermon in Oxford, calling the proposals a ‘national apostasy’.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Darwin was not the only critical voice that challenged the received understanding of the creation story in Genesis. Robert Chambers wrote the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* and Sir Charles Lyell produced his *Principles of Geology*.

the chapter not only explores the tensions at the heart of Victorian life, but, more importantly, it highlights how these tensions were interwoven through every aspect of Victorian society and, as a result, creates a context in which the two Scottish artists can be studied.

The central part of the thesis (Chapters 2 and 3) explores the religious outlook of two prominent, Victorian artists, William McTaggart (1835-1910) and William Dyce (1806-1864). McTaggart and Dyce share many similarities they were both Scottish and lived in nineteenth century Britain and they both enjoyed painting the landscapes of Scotland. Nevertheless, in many instances they were very different people.

William McTaggart is widely regarded as one of the great interpreters of the Scottish landscape and has attained the title – ‘The Scottish Impressionist’<sup>15</sup>. McTaggart was born on the west coast of Scotland to an uncomplicated and simple family. Nevertheless, it was with a sense of freedom to roam that William found a great affinity with the landscapes and seascapes of the ‘parish’ in which he lived and grew up. William’s father, Dugald, worked on the peats on Aros Moss and his mother, Barbra, was a strict disciplinarian. Yet, despite these humble beginnings William McTaggart became a full member of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1870 and I would argue that no other artist quite captures the harmony between humanity and nature<sup>16</sup>. McTaggart was a man of ‘quiet’ faith and he remained true to the Christian religion throughout his life<sup>17</sup>. In a continuation with the tradition of his family William was a low church, Presbyterian and served as an Elder in the

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<sup>15</sup> Per Kvaerne. *William McTaggart: Singing Songs of the Scottish Heart*. (Edinburgh: Atelier Books, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> William McTaggart often painted translucent figures that blended into rather than imposing themselves onto the landscape. An example of this would be *Cornfields (1896)* [Pl. 49a].

<sup>17</sup> Towards the end of his biography Caw describes McTaggart as a deeply religious man and that the book he knew and loved the best was the Bible. James Lewis Caw. *William McTaggart, R.S.A., V.P.R.S.W.* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons, 1917).

Free Church of Scotland. What is deeply interesting about McTaggart is that the subject and technique of his art naturally changed over time to reflect his personal beliefs and outlook. *The Past and Present* [Pl. 10] captures a hint of the Pre-Raphaelite movement; *Spring* [Pl. 17] conveys a deep emotional attachment to the landscape; while *The Storm* [Pl. 24] *reflects* the deep inner turmoil of the artist, both the Emigrant and St Columba series of paintings echo his deep love for his homeland.

The unique contribution, therefore, that William McTaggart provides to the broader argument of the thesis is that he offers an analysis of the works of art of a low-church Presbyterian, born on the west coast of Scotland from humble beginnings. As a result, the detailed study of the paintings by McTaggart throughout his life will provide a valuable insight, not only into the religious sensibilities of his day, but also valuable new perceptions into his particular religious faith. This study of William McTaggart also offers something new and distinctive in the field of McTaggart studies: although much has been written with regard to the Scottish artist's use of subject and technique, there has been comparatively little written about the faith of the Scottish artist, and its implications for his work<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, revisionist writers on McTaggart seem to omit, whether purposefully or not, what the original biography makes explicit; namely that McTaggart was a Christian man who was deeply affected by the Christian faith. This study of McTaggart, by contrast, takes his Christian faith, and its influence on his art, as its primary focus.

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<sup>18</sup>The biography *William McTaggart RSA* by his son-in-law James Lewis Caw provides the main source for the studies due to the fact that it is the most contemporaneous with the life of McTaggart and is the most reliable with regards a Victorian contextual understanding of the Scottish painter. However, the revisionist biographies: Lindsay Errington, *William McTaggart RSA*, (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1989) and Per Kvaerne, *William McTaggart: Singing Songs of the Scottish Heart*, (London: Atelier Books, 2007) are used throughout the thesis.



With this emphasis in mind a full biographical survey of the Scottish artist was completed. In addition, archives and journals were collated and I also consulted the McTaggart Family Papers, which are held at the National Library of Scotland<sup>19</sup>. The McTaggart Family Papers not only allowed me to look at the life of the Scottish artist from a new perspective but also allowed me to substantiate, or qualify what others had written about McTaggart.

The chapter presents a brief biographical account of McTaggart with a special emphasis placed upon his Gaelic upbringing and his Christian faith. Each of the works of art is then examined with regard to moments of transition in his life and faith. Each examination scrutinises each painting in detail to illuminate aspects of immanent and transcendent faith. The first major work of art studied is the Pre-Raphaelite painting – *The Past and the Present*, a painting which conveys symbolic meaning with regard to the decaying ancient church and the new, brighter future. The collation of paintings is brought towards a conclusion by considering two important sets of work from the oeuvre of McTaggart: the Emigrant and Columba paintings. Both sets of paintings have deeply transcendent qualities when the Scottish artist seeks meaning in the historical echoes of the west coast of Scotland: the migration of people from the west coast of Scotland to America and the arrival of Christianity to his homeland.

William Dyce was a distinguished Scottish artist who played a significant part in the formation of public art education in the United

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<sup>19</sup> The McTaggart Family Papers were given to the National Library of Scotland (NLS) and are now held in the Manuscript Department. The Inventory for McTaggart in the NLS is divided into three parts: Correspondence, Miscellaneous Papers and Printed Materials.

Kingdom<sup>20</sup>. Dyce was a highly educated Victorian polymath who studied Medicine at Marischal College, Aberdeen, was a full member of both the Royal Academy and the Royal Scottish Academy and was a founding member of the Motett Society. William Dyce was strongly influenced by his father, Dr William Dyce, who was a lecturer in Medicine at Marischal College and was well connected within the city of Aberdeen where the family lived. William Dyce was a devout man and was a member of the Episcopal Church in Scotland. Dyce planned to read Theology at Oxford with the intention of entering Holy Orders – but he never did. However, his High Episcopalian faith was represented in the liturgy he wrote, the ecclesiastical structures he designed but most of all in the works of art he produced. Many of his paintings received critical acclaim and continue to provide the backdrop of contemporary British life. His most highly thought of painting today is his exceptionally detailed seaside landscape of Pegwell Bay in Kent, now in the Tate Gallery<sup>21</sup>.

The main focus of Chapter 3 is to provide a sustained and rigorous analysis of the paintings of William Dyce as conveyors of Christian faith set against the backdrop of the theological and political debates confronting painters of religious art in the nineteenth century. When compared with McTaggart, Dyce contributes something very different to the thesis. William Dyce was born on the east coast of Scotland to an affluent and highly educated family who were very well connected in the fields of art, religion and politics. The Scottish artist was a High Church Episcopalian who considered ordination into the priesthood. Dyce was well travelled and, mainly due to the influence of German Nazarene

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<sup>20</sup> In July 1847 William Dyce received the commission to decorate the Queen's robing Room, Houses of Parliament, with frescoes of Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*. As a close friend of Prince Albert and William Gladstone Dyce received, what was, the most privileged and public commission in Victorian Britain.

<sup>21</sup> The full title of the work is *Pegwell Bay, Kent – A Recollection of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1858* [Pl. 113]; it was captured in 1858, painted in 1859 and exhibited in 1860.

painter Friedrich Overbeck whom he met in Rome, became a passionate proponent of medievalism<sup>22</sup>. The distinctive contribution that Dyce provides for the discussion is that he imposes his medieval images of faith, onto a very contemporary natural landscape of Scotland. Many have written about the considerable role that Dyce performed with regards the national debate on art, theology and politics, but very little has been said with regard to the personal faith that he expressed within his art; this thesis hopes to change that<sup>23</sup>.

The Dyce Papers, with the letters located at the National Library of Scotland and Edinburgh University Library, provide the primary sources for the thesis. The Dyce Papers are transcripts of the life, correspondence and writings of William Dyce by his son James Stirling Dyce. The original manuscripts are no longer extant. In addition to the Dyce Papers, I worked closely with the biographies written by Marcia R. Pointon and Caroline Babington. Due to the national status of William Dyce, there was a vast amount of material published in journals, newspapers and, of course, by art critics. The art critic that I reference throughout the chapter is John Ruskin. Ruskin was a leading art critic in Victorian Britain and he wrote extensively on the works of William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite movement<sup>24</sup>. I chose nine paintings that follow a chronological sequence

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<sup>22</sup> In 1809, six students at the Vienna Academy formed an artistic community in Vienna called the Brotherhood of St Luke that would form the nucleus for what would become the Nazarene Community in Rome. The principal motivation of the Nazarenes was a reaction against Neoclassicism and the routine art education of the academy system. They hoped to return to art which embodied spiritual values, and sought inspiration in artists of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, rejecting what they saw as the superficial virtuosity of later art. In Rome the group lived a semi-monastic existence, as a way of re-creating the nature of the medieval artist's workshop. Religious subjects dominated their output. However, by 1830 all except Overbeck had returned to Germany and the group was disbanded. The Nazarenes had a strong influence both upon the German art academie and the Pre-Raphaelite movement in the United Kingdom. Mitchell Benjamin Frank. *Romantic Painting Redefined: Nazarene Tradition and the Narratives of Romanticism*. (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Marcia R. Pointon, *William Dyce, 1806–1864: A Critical Biography*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

Caroline Babington, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> In 1855 John Ruskin mocks the exhibit *Christabel* [Pl. 110a] for not displaying the fine detail that was required [Pl. 110a]. On the other hand the art critic complements the painting *Titian Preparing to*

and provide a sustained narrative with regard to the Scottish artist's personal faith.

The chapter opens with a brief biographical account of the life of William Dyce. I specifically highlight the encounter between Dyce and the Nazarene community as an informative moment for the young Scottish artist when he becomes versed in medieval art and theology. The mission for Dyce was now to articulate this historical Jesus to a modern day audience. However, in making a stand for a medieval Christ, Dyce was now entering into the public debate that confronted numerous painters of religious art in the nineteenth century. For many, the great dividing line was among those who linked progress to nationalism and the Protestant faith and those who supported what was seen as the more regressive elements of medieval Roman Catholicism. This dividing line runs through much of the art that is then examined.

The first major work of art that is analysed is *Omnia Vanitas* [Pl. 102a]. The painting is, at one level, a simple sermon by Dyce – ‘do you want to be a saint or a sinner?’ – but there is a degree of sophistication. The painting avoids the public ridicule that was directed towards Charles Collins’ *Convent Thoughts* [Pl. 101]<sup>25</sup>, regarded as an example of Roman Catholic regression, but it does bring hints of medievalism into the art world. In the next piece of art studied – *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102] – once again Dyce is subtly absorbing his medieval vision of faith into the canvas. The painting becomes a proto-type for Holmon Hunt’s *Hireling Shepherd* [Pl. 104] and, consequently, is regarded as

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*Make his First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111a] for the colour employed and the detail exhibited. John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, (London: George Allen, 1909), Vol. 19, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Collins exhibited *Convent Thoughts* at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1851. The missal shows both the Annunciation and the Crucifixion. The costume of the nun demonstrates she is a novice possibly meditating upon her final vows. The flowers were painted in the Oxford garden of Thomas Combe. A review in the satirical magazine *Punch* dismissed *Mariana* as ‘medievalism in a couple of woodcuts’, *Punch*, 1851, 219.

an important connection with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood<sup>26</sup>. In choosing medieval and regressive religious imagery, William Dyce expresses a transcendent image of the divine, but he wishes to educate his contemporaries with that vision.

The next painting considered - *Titian Preparing to Make his First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] – is included to demonstrate that Dyce now affirms ‘naturalism’, as espoused by John Ruskin, where the immediate and contemporary is painted in minute detail and brought to life<sup>27</sup>. Dyce, consequently, is beginning to affirm an immanent representation of the divine as witnessed in nature. Yet, the Scottish artist aspires to represent the medieval image of Christ in the contemporary. Accordingly, the next series of paintings studied, the biblical landscapes, combine a transcendent image of the divine, from a historic moment in time, within an immanent framework. This tension between human figures and landscape is brought into sharpest contrast in Dyce’s most celebrated work – *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113].

Chapter 4 moves the thesis from the nineteenth century to modern Britain, so that a comparison can be made between two contemporary Scottish artists and their Victorian predecessors.

Andy Goldsworthy is a present-day ecological artist, whose branch of art developed from the Land Art Movement<sup>28</sup>. Goldsworthy describes

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<sup>26</sup> *The Times* published an article which highlighted the connection between the two works of art: ‘Dyce even asked the leading Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt to paint his own version of *Jacob and Rachel* while it was still on display in 1850, Hunt called his *The Hireling Shepherd*’. *The Times*, 6 July 1850.

<sup>27</sup> Outdoor naturalism where every piece of minute detail is picked up and transferred to the canvas and careful observation is made of light and shadow. The ideals of naturalism were championed by John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Vol. 3) (London: George Allen, 1883), 167.

<sup>28</sup> Land art is an art movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s, in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked. It is an art form that is created in nature, using natural materials such as soil, rock, logs branches, leaves and water. Sculptures are not placed in the landscape; rather, the landscape is the means of their creation.

himself as a sculptor who ‘works directly with the land and uses materials found in the landscape’<sup>29</sup>. In trying to discern the religious outlook of Goldsworthy, it is important to note the words he employs on the subject: ‘I am sympathetic towards the Green Movement’s ecological concern. I belong to no Church’<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, the Scottish artist does describe working in and with the landscape as being ‘deeply emotional’ and ‘profoundly spiritual’ but this relationship is literally ‘beneath the surface’ and makes no connection with a divine being beyond the everyday. Therefore, each work of art studied - *Holes and Cracks Beneath the Surface* [Pl. 122], *Leaf Throws* [Pl. 123] and *Snowballs in Summer* [Pl. 124] – re-affirms that Goldsworthy is working within a purely immanent theological framework where the material, the immediate and contemporary are all important.

In contrast, Peter Howson states that he had a religious conversion in 2000 after a period of traumatic rehabilitation<sup>31</sup>. It is stated that Howson through his experience of abuse – whether self-inflicted or from bullying – afforded him an affinity with those individuals who are classed as somehow ‘on the edge’<sup>32</sup>. Accordingly, the first work of art studied was *The Heroic Dosser* [Pl. 128] in which Howson depicts the ‘common man’ from the ‘meaner streets of Glasgow’ and places the Scottish artist into the branch of art that deals with ‘gritty realism’<sup>33</sup>. Howson explains the motivation in his art in his own words: ‘I really want people to try and look at the whole nature of Britain, and the way we are’<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, in the two studies - the *Harrowing of Hell* [Pl. 133] and the *Everlasting Man* [Pl. 134] - the crucified figure of Christ takes a prominent position

<sup>29</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy)

<sup>30</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 161.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Howson went through a program of treatment for his alcoholism and drug addiction at the Castle Craig Hospital in Peebles, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Heller, *Peter Howson*, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1993, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Heller, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Heller, 53.

in the painting, but in neither of these paintings do we observe a historical event, but rather a drama that is being performed on the contemporary streets of Glasgow. Therefore, Howson paints within an immanent framework of theology where God is experienced in the everyday and through human relationships.

The conclusion not only makes a comparison between the works of art of the nineteenth century and the those from contemporary Scotland, but it also attempts to question if religious outlook, as revealed through these paintings, has changed in emphasis over time. In order to interrogate their assumptions with regard to religious outlook, employing the twin theological concepts of immanence and transcendence, a direct comparison is made between the paintings from Victorian Britain and those works of art from the contemporary setting. Whereas the Victorian painters McTaggart and Dyce turned for solace to a transcendent God in a time of change and crisis, their Scottish counterparts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a period equally characterised by change and crisis, have turned to an exclusively immanent framework; for Goldsworthy, this is the natural world, for Howson, it is to a Christ encountered in the grim realities of the underbelly of society in Glasgow.

## Chapter 1: Tensions in Victorian Society

Writing in 1833 Edward Bulwer Lytton, lifelong friend of Charles Dickens, saw the death of Lord Byron in 1824 as marking a historic transition:

When Byron passed away, the feeling he had represented craved utterance no more. With a sigh we turned to the actual and practical career of life: we awoke from the morbid, the passionate, the dreaming, 'the moonlight and dimness of the mind', and by a natural reaction addressed ourselves to the active and daily objectives which lay before us...Hence the strong attachment to the Practical, which became so visible a little time after the death of Byron, and which continues...to characterise the temper of the time.<sup>35</sup>

In the shadow of Lytton's words is the First Reform Act of 1832, whose abolition of rotten boroughs and the extension of the franchise to respectable householders and tenant-farmers made manifest the displacement of aristocratic authority by that of the rising middle-class. The leaders of the new, increasingly democratic age are, he tells his readers, not the poets and refiners but the 'statesmen and the economists', people like the philosopher of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham. However, life is never that simple whereby one day we live by one viewpoint and the next we awake with a different view of the world. Radford and Sandy make this case in their book *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era* when they argue that there was a tension in Victorian life between those who looked to the past for a sense of comfort and stability and those who embraced the supposedly more civilised and rational Victorian age.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, *England and the English* 1833, ed Standish Meacham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 286.

<sup>36</sup> Radford & Sandy, *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, 3.



In order to shed light on these twin forces of progress and regression the chapter will in turn look at several aspects of Victorian life; these include: politics, economics, society, culture and religion. This chapter, therefore, considers the wider forces in British society that impinge on Scottish political, social and cultural life and it will also provide specific references to Scottish society. Although the thesis will look at the Victorian period as a whole, most of the examples are drawn from the mid century.

## 1.1 Victorian Britain

The Victorian period is the term used to describe the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 until her death in 1901. It has been characterised as a long period of British history that enjoyed peace, prosperity and national self-confidence.

From 1832 with the passage of the Reform Act, the political agenda became increasingly liberal with the momentum gradually moving towards social reform, political reform, industrial reform and including the widening of the voting franchise. If the overall narrative of Mid-Victorian life was progress it will also be highlighted that there were periods of regression, a search for traditional values and a growing sense of nostalgia. This sense of nostalgia comes from a belief that there is an idealised moment in history, when things were better than we find them today. In international relations the era provided a long period of peace, known as the Pax Britannica. The Crimean War (1854) only temporarily disrupted economic, colonial and industrial expansion.

The population of the United Kingdom rose dramatically during this period. The population of England almost doubled from 16.8 million in 1851 to 30.5 million in 1901 and Scotland's population rose

significantly from 2.8 million in 1851 to 4.4 million in 1901. At the same time, around 15 million emigrants left the United Kingdom for the new lands of the Empire.<sup>37</sup> With these changes brought about by population expansion and displacement, industrialisation and newfound opportunities through the expansion of capital, we witness change in the political, economic, social cultural, religious and scientific spheres of life and each will now be examined.

## 1.2 Politics

The decades of reform and revolution give way to the rise of liberal Britain in mid-Victorian times; the Great Reform Bill of 1832 and the popular chartist movement of the 1840's lay the foundations for what would become a more confident liberal and progressive nation<sup>38</sup>. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 provides a pivotal point in British politics that will pave the way for a broad consensus of free trade and a philosophy of *Laissez-faire*. Lord John Russell, a leading liberal reformer and Prime Minister, would read extracts to parliament from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* where Russell would articulate, 'We cannot feed the people. State interference in the food trade would so undermine

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<sup>37</sup> A letter from Hugh Maclean, a tenant farmer in the Hebrides, to his landlord, Earl Bathurst, was typical for the time. In the letter Maclean asks the Earl if the people on the islands could emigrate to Canada citing overcrowding and poor working conditions as the main reasons for wanting to leave....Catalogue Ref: HO 44/13, The National Archives.

<sup>38</sup> By 1830, when William IV became king, England had already seen the makings not so much of French-style revolution as of the kind of agitation for change that would come to characterise the Victorian 'Age of Improvement,' as historian Asa Briggs calls it. There was some violence by and against labourers - most notably the violent repression of working people at a gathering in London's Saint Peter's Fields, 1819, but with the coming into power of the Whig Party in 1830, the political system passed into the hands of men willing to make concessions if not to the unskilled working people, then at least to the capitalists of Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham, men responsible for Britain's new and remarkable urban and industrial development and for augmenting its economic power at home and abroad. Following the prime ministership of the Tory war hero Wellington, Whig Earl Grey and his cabinet saw that Britain had serious problems, and they made a decision to adapt the system sufficiently to stave off disaster. When the Reform Bill finally made it past the conservative House of Lords in 1832, the vote was extended to the property owning class in general. Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn).

*all private enterprises* that eventually *everything* would be abandoned to the state care of the government'<sup>39</sup>.

The political perspective of both liberalism and conservatism would often transcend the traditional Liberal and Tory parties and would contain elements of progress and regression. Therefore, care needs to be taken with regards terminology. With regard to liberalism, the political position would include the need to change the ancient regime to reflect the contemporary condition, increased democratic representation for the middle classes and freedom of religion, free trade and private property. On the other hand conservatism would reflect a political stance that believed in the retention of traditional social structures as a sign of continuity and stability. Conservatives would believe in placing the interests of the land owning classes above the new industrial class and to retain the close link between Church and State.

Between 1847 and 1868 the Tories lost six general elections creating a political landscape that was dominated by the Liberal coalition. In post-Crimean Britain, Lord Palmerston rose to the ascendancy providing leadership for a Liberal alliance that attempted to fulfil the expectations of a growing middle-class. Palmerston seemed to be closely identified with the age as an aristocrat, reformer, free trader, internationalist and a chauvinist. Palmerston's position during the whole of his first ministry was never secure. He survived partly by luck and partly because his own political skills outmanoeuvred the Opposition<sup>40</sup>.

Caution, however, needs to be taken with regards the extent of reform undertaken by the Liberals in mid-Victorian Britain. Palmerston chose reforms that would minimise disruption and would not threaten the

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<sup>39</sup> Hansard, lxxxix (19 Jan. 1847) in *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, K. T. Hoppen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 142.

<sup>40</sup> K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 198. Palmerston was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1855 – 1858 and 1859 – 1865.

government's position; for example, the Cambridge University Act of 1856. Palmerston and the Liberal reforming agenda seemed to be personified in his Chancellor of the Exchequer of the second administration, William Gladstone. Gladstone's conviction was that a reasoned and flexible conservatism should be the basis of his politics; that is, a belief in tradition that is tempered by reform and a conviction of the appropriateness of harnessing the forces of change to maintain the established society<sup>41</sup>. During this period of political change we see a new kind of Conservative Party emerge.

John Wilson Croker, writing in the *Quarterly Review* on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1830 first used the name 'Conservative' as a description of the old Tory Party. However, it was under the political leadership of Sir Robert Peel that the fundamental principles of this 'new' Conservatism were developed. In a speech in 1838 Peel stated:

By Conservative principles I mean....the maintenance of the Peerage and Monarchy – the continuance of the just powers and attributes of King, Lords and Commons in this country....By Conservative principles I mean that, coexistent with equality of civil rights and privileges, there shall be an established religion and imperishable faith and that established religion shall maintain the doctrines of the Protestant Church...By Conservative principles, I mean...the maintenance, defence and continuance of those laws, those institutions, that society, and those habits and manners, which have contributed to and mould and form the character of Englishmen.

To Peel, therefore, the Conservative Party was primarily a constitutional and religious party and it was the aim of the Conservatives to adapt these

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<sup>41</sup> D.M. Schreuder, "Gladstone and Italian Unification 1848-70: The Making of a Liberal?", *English Historical Review*, (1970), 85. During Palmerston's Premiership Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer between 1859 – 1866.

ideals in both government and opposition to maintain the 'throne' and the 'altar'.

Arguably, the most influential Conservative politician of the period was a man of Jewish birth – Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli served twice as Prime Minister and played a central role in the creation of the modern Conservative Party. A favourite of Queen Victoria he identified closely with the glory of the British Empire and at home he developed the principles of one-nation conservatism<sup>42</sup>. Disraeli had an influential voice in world affairs and his political battles with Gladstone provided the backdrop of Victorian political debate.

The developing political class should be equipped with knowledge if they were to make informed choices in this new self-confident liberal Britain. In 1855 and 1861 we see the abolition of the 'Taxes on Knowledge' as the stamp duties on newspapers and the customs and excise duties on paper were removed. A number of new and influential newspapers were launched including the *Daily Telegraph* (1855) and *The Irish Times* (1859). However, London and provincial papers of the 1860's still catered for the middle and upper classes' readership; 'the governing classes: aristocratic, official, parliamentary, financial and commercial'<sup>43</sup>.

After the First Reform Act of 1832 Scottish politics remained Liberal and anti-Tory for nearly the rest of the century<sup>44</sup>. The Liberal Party with its emphasis on widening the franchise and reform attracted

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<sup>42</sup> One-nation conservatism sees society as organic and values paternalism and pragmatism. It is a vision of society that attempts to bridge the divisions in society by placing a particular emphasis on the paternalistic obligations of the upper classes to those classes below them.

<sup>43</sup> A. J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England 1855 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 1976), 38. Times 67, 000, Daily News 150, 000, Daily Telegraph 190 000. Daily circulation figures.

<sup>44</sup> There were some exceptions to this traditional view including the work of Sir Archibald Alison who was a traditional Victorian Tory who enjoyed the sympathies of both the country and working classes.

many Scottish people who felt aggrieved with the status quo<sup>45</sup>. The total of 4,500 voters in Scotland, in 1832, represented just less than one in a hundred adult males, against one in eight in England<sup>46</sup>. Free trade also carried a deep resonance with the people of Scotland, which supported the ideals of the Liberal coalition. The campaign against the Corn Laws began in Scotland where Scottish agriculture was less committed to protectionism and business was heavily dependent on international free trade. The Scottish people also took a great pride in their educational system in its ability to provide learning for their progressive liberal ideals. In 1865 there were proportionately six times more University students in Scotland than in England<sup>47</sup>.

### 1.3 Economics

In the 1850s Great Britain was riding the crest of a wave and was the only world power in both a political and economic sense. The Great Exhibition of 1851 demonstrated to the world the superiority of British manufactured goods and the nation's commitment to economic liberalisation and free trade. For Britain the benefits of free trade were obvious as she exported her advanced manufactured goods and services to the Empire and the rest of the world. The Exhibition attracted over six million people from around the country for a celebration that seemed to unify the nation in artisan self-reliance, free-trade internationalism and monarchical chauvinism<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> From 1832 to 1914 the Liberal Party enjoyed an unrivalled political hegemony in Scotland, with only one major setback in the general election of 1900. Liberalism seemed tailor-made for the Scottish psyche. As one Liberal put it, 'I am a Liberal because I am a Scotchman': Michael Fry, *Patronage and Principle: A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 166.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>48</sup> *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations* had some notable exhibits including: a jacquard loom, an envelope machine, kitchen appliances, steel making displays and a reaping machine.

The ascendancy of Britain that made her the ‘workshop of the world’ was a result of a unique set of circumstances, according to Peter Mathias<sup>49</sup>; never before and never since has one country dominated the world economy. However, at this point we need to affirm Gradgrind in Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854) when he exclaims ‘we want nothing but the facts’ but the facts do seem to confirm Matthias’s claim. Britain by the 1850’s was by far the richest country in the world. David Landes calculated the per capita incomes of the UK, France and Germany to be £32.6, £21.1 and £13.3<sup>50</sup>. Although some economic historians doubt these exact figures, Geoffrey Best makes the case that the proportionality is accurate<sup>51</sup>. Also according to Best the wealth of Britain was going up quickly during the mid-Victorian period and his estimates for gross national income are: £523.3m. in 1851, £668m. in 1861 and £916.6m in 1871<sup>52</sup>. This increase both in global economic status and in national wealth was supported by an increase in population, the ‘golden age’ of farming and the increase in supply of power and the number of machines. By 1850 the output of coal had reached 56 million tons a year; pig iron output was over two million tons (half the total of the world output); there were 1, 800 cotton factories, employing 328, 000 workers and using steam engines with 71, 000 total horsepower; and there were over 5000 miles of railways<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation*, 230.

<sup>50</sup> David S. Landes, *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol. vi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 353.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 21.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, 394.

This economic epoch brought an air of confidence to mid-Victorian life that became engrained into the 'cult of progress'<sup>54</sup>. G.R. Porter, in 1851, captures the moment in his book *The Progress of the Nation* where he self-assuredly reports, 'It must at all times be a matter of great interest and utility the means by which any community has attained eminence among nations'<sup>55</sup>. For Porter that dominant community over world affairs, economic prosperity and intellectual sophistication was the British middle-class. Care, however, has to be taken when we consider the size and proportion of the Victorian middle-class. Hobsbawm places a figure of 200, 000 genuine middle-class people in England and Wales in mid-Victorian Britain. Hobsbawm, however, does go on to concede that the number of people who could be described as middle-class proceeds to grow substantially from 1851 to 1871<sup>56</sup>.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the government policy in Britain came as near *laissez-faire* as has ever been practicable both in ancient regimes and modern times. In the classical liberal economy the objectives are to create and maintain the best conditions for capitalism. The optimum condition for that economy is one of self-regulation and self-expansion, without government interference, and with the overall consequence of maximising the 'wealth of the nation.' The industrial revolution produced the seeds for a liberal economy and from the abolition of the Corn Laws (1846) the principal aim was to maintain it.

However, in the midst of all this change there was a part of Victorian society that yearned for the stability of the past and lamented

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<sup>54</sup> Progress captures the idea that the world can become increasingly better through the advances in science, technology, modernisation, liberty etc....Therefore, a belief in an immanent God would have an understanding that, for instance, the divine is part of social changes that improve the quality of life.

<sup>55</sup> G.R. Porter, *The Progress of the Nation*, (London: Charles Knight & Co, 1851), 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Birth of the Industrial Revolution. Revised Edition*. (New York: New Press, 1999), 32.



the loss of the ancient regime. This longing for a former age is best evoked by George Eliot in *Adam Bede* (1859), recalling even then the irrecoverable times of the early 1800s. 'Leisure is gone', reflected the novelist, 'gone where the spinning wheels are gone, and the packhorses, and the slow wagons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons. Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them; it only creates a vacuum for eager thoughts to rush in. Even idleness is eager now, eager for amusement: prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodicals and exciting novels'<sup>57</sup>. What was missing, for many, was a simpler way of living where the economics had its foundations on the agricultural landscape and the parish was at the heart of life.

Roy Porter captures something of the essence of the economy of the parish in the eighteenth century when he writes, 'Industry still fed off the soil: timber, hides, hops, flax, madder, saffron, horn for knife handles, bones for glue – these were the essential raw materials. And most industry was cottage industry: spinning, lace making, stocking knitting, tanning, smithying and coopering thrived in villages....family-life and work danced in step to the phases of nature. Ploughing, harvesting, fruit picking, fishing and chimney sweeping – all such works were seasonal'.<sup>58</sup> At the centre of parochial life were the squire and the parson providing connections with the ancient past and stability for the present<sup>59</sup>. This feeling of the loss of stability, in the face of change, was also felt in the social sphere.

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<sup>57</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 473.

<sup>58</sup> Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (London: Penguin, 1990), 143.

<sup>59</sup> In the Middle Ages the term squire referred to a trainee knight. By the time we reach the eighteenth century the term still retains its status but now refers to the leader of an English village.

## 1.4 Society

Palmerston captures well the main tenets of mid-Victorian society when he spoke explicitly during a speech to the House of Commons:

‘We have shown the example of a nation, in which every class of society accepts with cheerfulness the lot which providence has assigned to it; while at the same time every individual of each class is constantly striving to raise himself in the social scale....by the steady energetic execution of the moral and intellectual faculties with which his creator endowed him’<sup>60</sup>.

Here we see the Prime Minister of the day overflowing with confidence with regards the improvement of the individual’s lot by the individual’s own gifts. This confidence in individual progress was translated to all parts of society.

During the decades of mid-Victorian Britain we see an expanding economy and a dynamic society. We witness an almost unparalleled construction of industry, Town Halls, religious buildings, rail and canal networks<sup>61</sup>. Rich men were mixing with titled men on boards of new railway companies. New expressions in fashion and the arts were being shared by the middle and upper classes. Industrial magnates in the North West of England would use their newfound wealth to send their children to the expanding boarding schools where they might mix with the country aristocracy and provide for the family status as well as wealth.

It might have been easy for this prosperous class of people to forget those who lived over the other side of the high-bricked wall and in the slums of the towns and cities. Many of the mid-Victorians who did

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<sup>60</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Lord Palmerston*. Reprinted from 1882 (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 16.

<sup>61</sup> Between 1840 and 1880, 17, 000 miles of railway lines were built in Britain. [Hobsbawm. *Industry and Empire*, 73]. St Pancras railway station and Midland Hotel in London, opened in 1868 designed in Gothic Revival style by Sir George Gilbert Scott. During the nineteenth century new major canals were built including the *Caledonian Canal* and the *Manchester Ship Canal*.

not forget the impoverished plight of the many believed that the relative decline in poverty would be followed by the abolition of destitution. All that was required was to follow the lead of economic expansion and the principles of thrift, self-help and hard work. Men of strong academic standing, like Henry Fawcett, looked positively to the day when there would be a society of well-fed and well-educated English citizens supported by skilled artisans and peasant proprietors<sup>62</sup>. Social change is another example of where the cult of progress might implicitly be regarded as divinely inspired as society moves towards prosperity and comfort for all citizens. However, poverty was very real for many who had moved into the great cities looking for work.

Large numbers of skilled and unskilled people who moved into urban settings kept wages down to barely subsistence levels. Available housing was scarce and expensive, resulting in overcrowding. These problems were magnified in London, where the population grew at record rates. Large houses were turned into flats and tenements, and as landlords failed to maintain these dwellings slum housing developed. Kellow Chesney described the situation in the following terms:

'Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up substantial part of the metropolis...In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room.'<sup>63</sup>

For the many who found themselves in these desperate circumstances the eloquence of speeches on individual self-help would not have been

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<sup>62</sup> Briggs, *Improvement*, 403. Henry Fawcett was a blind academic, statesman and economist; he was made Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge.

<sup>63</sup> Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian Underworld*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991), 32.

welcome but rather there would have been a looking backwards to a time when the poor were looked after in a very different way.

Eighteenth century Britain was predominantly an agrarian society where the tenant farmer, a species rare elsewhere in Europe, was for many the pride of British agriculture. The system of tenant farming brought about for a few the prospects of rising living standards. As Porter points out, 'the tenant farmers gentrified themselves, rebuilding farmsteads and investing in fine china and furniture, silver plate, sprung carriages and vintage cellars'.<sup>64</sup> A pair of rhymes satirised the social change of the farmers:

#### **1722**

Man to the plough;  
Wife to the cow;  
Girl to the sow;  
Boy to the mow;  
And your rents will be netted.

#### **1822**

Man tally-ho;  
Miss piano;  
Wife silk and satin;  
Boy Greek and Latin;  
And you'll all be gazetted.

Tenant farmers were one of the success stories of Georgian Britain, and they marked their good fortune by claiming their share of good things in life and seemingly supporting the poor in their parish.

David Owen makes the case that the eighteenth century witnessed an 'extraordinary outpouring of wealth from the merchant aristocracy and gentry' aimed at easing the lives of the poor in their communities<sup>65</sup>. This philanthropic giving was often organised and directed to institutions that included schools and hospitals. The number of hospitals establishing this

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<sup>64</sup> Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (London: Penguin, 1990), 189.

<sup>65</sup> David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1964), 64

new kind of relationship between the giver and recipient of charity rose from two before 1700 to thirty-one by 1800, a statistic that reflects the deeper transformations in social fabric of early modern Britain<sup>66</sup>. The real dilemma of the eighteenth century benefactor, therefore, was learning to live with the shift in the meaning of poverty from the population distribution associated with industrialisation and urbanisation. David Owen points out:

Would be out of the question to translate to an urban environment the network of relationships, personal and professional that made rural England an ordered society. Thus those who sought to improve the lot of their fellows faced a situation in which some of their traditional methods came to seem grossly inadequate...<sup>67</sup>.

It was the translation from an agricultural society to an urban environment that created deep tensions within Victorian Britain where the provision in the Poor Law shifted from the support of able-bodied males in the local parish to the building of workhouses alongside the city slums<sup>68</sup>. On many occasions it meant that the Victorian looked back to a time that appeared more settled and at peace with itself.

## 1.5 Culture

If progressive attitudes were found running through the fabric of mid-Victorian British society then they impinged in an explicit way on culture. The Victorian artist or writer invariably wants to tell their audience a story of where we have come from, the nature of the present

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<sup>66</sup> Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 87-107

<sup>67</sup> David Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 91-92

<sup>68</sup> The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 grouped together rural parishes into poor law unions and most of these were building workhouses. The Act abolished outdoor relief for the able-bodied and their families and there was a centralised Poor Law Commission to direct the administration of poor relief.

and what the possibilities are for the future. A distinct narrative, therefore, gave the dynamic thrust of the mid-Victorian work of art or novel. There was, therefore, a strong link between Victorian culture and the politics and economics of the age.

We admire Anthony Trollope's honesty when he wrote, 'I write for money. Of course I do. It is for money we all work, lawyers, publishers, authors and the rest.'<sup>69</sup> In a culture where free-enterprise reigns supreme and an individual is left to make good themselves, who can blame Trollope and his contemporaries for producing works of art that 'sell'. The fate of the solitary artist and their work was often left in the hands of the critics, publishers and libraries who acted as intermediaries between the artist and the consumer. Lund, an art critic of Mid-Victorian Britain, summed up the situation well when he wrote, 'protection to literature or science is mischievous in nearly the same way as protection to commerce. The let-alone system is equally desirable to both.'<sup>70</sup>

Within the sphere of culture, literature played the prominent role. It was seen as admirable that a picture should aspire to the condition of literature. Ruskin underlines this point when he praises Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) [Pl. 1] by describing it as, 'one of the most perfect poems or pictures which modern times have seen'.<sup>71</sup> One of the most common commentaries that occurred in mid-Victorian Britain

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<sup>69</sup> N. John Hall, *The Letters of Anthony Trollope* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 167. Trollope's father was a barrister and as a boy he attended Harrow School. However, Anthony failed the bar, his ventures into farming were unprofitable and he lost his inheritance. As the son of landed gentry he wanted his sons to be raised as gentlemen and to attend Oxford and Cambridge. Trollope suffered much misery in his boyhood owing to the disparity between his family's social background and his own comparative poverty.

<sup>70</sup> M. Lund, "Writers and Readers in 1850", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 17 (1984): 16.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 247. John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) was the leading British art critic of the Victorian era, also an art patron, draughtsman, watercolorist, a prominent social and religious thinker and philanthropist. In his writings Ruskin emphasised the connections between nature, art and society.

was the story of the nation's social condition. Therefore, after the publication of Benjamin Disraeli's *The Two Nations* in 1845 we witness a plethora of paintings that try to capture the social divide in Victorian Britain. George Clausen's *A Spring Morning, Haverstock Hill* (1881) [Pl. 2] divides the canvass into two by a prominent lamppost in the centre. On one side of the painting we witness an affluent mother and child whilst on the other side we see ragged road workers<sup>72</sup>.

The general consensus, with probably the exception of the novel, seems to be fairly unfavourable with regards the merits of the artistic and cultural legacy of mid-Victorian Britain. This hostility seems to intensify when commentaries on mid-Victorian cultural life in Scotland are explored. One writer on the history of Scotland states, 'While in the economic sphere nineteenth-century Scotland was eminently successful, its performance in arts and culture was distinctly inferior – indeed in some areas there were almost no noteworthy achievements.'<sup>73</sup> In the same article Briggs fails to mention William Dyce who was an eminent pre-Raphaelite painter of his time and almost dismisses McTaggart as a French Impressionist, the reputation of both of whom I hope to revise in this thesis.

In mid-Victorian Britain the market, as in many other vestiges of life, became entangled in the world of literature. At the same time we witness the growth of the 'professional' author who tried to throw a cloak of dignity over the cruder imperatives of commerce and cash. The social status of writers was debated. In 1847 G.H. Lewes had no doubts that,

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<sup>72</sup> William Frith painted *The Crossing Sweeper* (1858), which illustrated the collision of wealth and poverty on a London Street [Pl. 3].

<sup>73</sup> Briggs, *Improvement*, 235.

'literature has become a profession. It is a means of subsistence, almost as certain as the bar or the church.'<sup>74</sup> Others were not quite so generous with their opinions. *The Observer* in 1884 says that writing is a business that requires no formal training like cab driving and is only adopted after all other avenues of livelihood had been closed.<sup>75</sup> Whatever the defined status of a writer their numbers certainly expanded; it is estimated that by the 1880s 14, 000 writers were making a living in London alone.<sup>76</sup>

One of the main obstacles for the Victorian writer was to get their work published. Of the 143 manuscripts that were sent to the publisher Macmillan between 1868 and 1870, only six were accepted.<sup>77</sup> For many writers the prospect of poverty, drink and failure was part of their daily life experience. This was a great challenge to the new brigade of authors who had freed themselves from aristocratic patronage and secured independence, and now stood in relation to the publishing industry with nothing to offer but their labour. For a few, however, the rewards of writing and publishing were quite munificent. The most substantial earners of the period were Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot<sup>78</sup>. In Scotland Sir Walter Scott was very popular both in his homeland and around the world.

Sir Walter Scott (1771 – 1832) was a Scottish historical novelist, playwright and poet whose influence penetrated mid-Victorian life and, at a time of rapid change, provided a reassuring romantic image of Scottish

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<sup>74</sup> V. Bonham-Carter, *Authors by Profession* (London: Society of Authors, 1984), 85. George Henry Lewis (1817 – 1878) was a philosopher and critic of literature and theatre. He became part of the mid-Victorian movement that encouraged discussion of Darwinism, positivism and religious scepticism.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> P. L. Shillingsburg, *Pegasus in Harness: Victorian Publishing and W. M. Thackeray* (Charleston: University of Virginia, 1992), 6. Victorian literature forms a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the twentieth century and is regarded as a high point in British writing when the novel became the leading form of prose in English.

<sup>77</sup> J. A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 210.

<sup>78</sup> On the publication of *The Warden* (1855) Trollope received £9 8s. 8d., *Barchester Towers* (1857) he received £100 and *The Three Clerks* (1858) £250 and future profits.



life. The Scottish writer was not only admired in his native land but was hugely popular throughout Europe. He was the favourite novelist for people as varied as Newman and Mendelssohn. Scott's *Waverley* novels played a significant part in rehabilitating the public perception of the Scottish Highlands and its culture. The fact that Scott was a Lowland Episcopalian made him acceptable to a conservative English reading public where, in this position, he could describe Highland Scotland in different terms to the commonly held view of a place full of barbaric religious fanatics. In the novels of Scott the violent religious and political conflicts of Scotland's recent past could be seen as belonging to history as the nation was to move away from clan warfare to a modern world of literacy and industrial capitalism. What is interesting about Scott is that he does not search for an idealised moment in history but, rather, he writes about an optimistic view of the contemporary world. Therefore, the subtitle of *Waverley* was 'Tis Sixty Years Hence' indicating that these traumatic events happened at least sixty years ago.

The characteristic mid-Victorian three-volume novel was priced at one and a half guineas, well above the weekly wage for the skilled artisan. Increasingly professional writers for the middle-classes wrote the publications. The middle-class market at which most novels were aimed grew through this period; it was thought that the respectable novel-reading public of Victorian life had grown from 50, 000 in 1830 to 120,000 in 1890.<sup>79</sup> In this context, subjects that were portrayed in the mid-Victorian novel were to reflect the aspirations of the middle-class. Hoppen makes the point that Dickens felt more at home dealing with

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2.

capitalism in general rather than industry in particular.<sup>80</sup> It was therefore money, debt and bankruptcy that were some of the major themes of the novel as is witnessed in Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1853 – 1855) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872).

The debate with regards the quality and legacy of Victorian music divides opinion. Temperley makes the case that of the many operas, oratorios (at least 150), symphonies (over 60), concertos (over 90), concert overtures (over 100), known to have been produced by British composers in the mid-1800s virtually nothing has lasted save a few hymns, some church music by S.S. Wesley, a handful of hackneyed songs and some piano pieces by John Field.<sup>81</sup> I would strongly disagree with Temperley's stance. Stanford's church music still holds a central place in Anglican churches and particularly popular works include his Evening Service in B flat, A, G and C, his three Latin Motets (*Beati quorum via, Justorum animae* and *Coelos ascendit hodie*), and his anthem *For lo, I raise up*. Parry's *Prometheus Unbounded*, which first appeared in 1880 and was based on the four-act play by Percy Bysshe Shelley, is still loved by some. Furthermore, Victorians were deeply musical. The number of music editions copyrighted increased from 151 in 1835 to 8,063 in 1901, the number of pianos manufactured from 23, 000 in 1850 to 75, 000 in 1910, the percentage of London parish churches maintaining choral services rose from five in 1858 to thirty-eight in 1882 and the number of professional musicians increased six-fold between 1841 and 1901.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 390. Although in general terms Hoppen is correct there are, however, a number of good examples of *industrial novels* including Disraeli's *Sybil* Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and even Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*.

<sup>81</sup> N. Temperley, "The Lost Chord", *Victorian Studies*, 30 (1986): 31.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

Like writers, many composers remained subject to market forces where professionalism meant a move from patronage to an insecure independence. Many composers sought refuge by moving to the continent and in particular Germany; for a time some of the more promising composers, including Charles Neate and Cipriani Potter, belonged to Beethoven's circle in Vienna<sup>83</sup>. Others found sanctuary in the Church. Stainer received £120 a year from Magdalene College in 1860 for playing the organ and training the choir while S. S. Wesley gained £60 from Hereford Cathedral in 1832. In 1849 Wesley published an article demanding better standing for Church musicians, 'Before our Palestrinas can find a home at Cathedrals, the difficulties of musical composition must be appreciated, and our artists allowed to rank with men of true eminence in other walks of life.'<sup>84</sup>

Unlike other purveyors of culture in the nineteenth century, architects saw themselves and were seen by others as belonging to a recognised profession. Kaye makes this point when he writes, 'architects regard themselves as professionals in formally establishing their craft in a way that writers, painters and musicians have never been able to do.'<sup>85</sup> From 1850 onwards the number of professional architects rose substantially. In 1850 there were fewer than 500 architects in the whole

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<sup>83</sup> Charles Neate (1784 – 1877) was one of the original members of the Philharmonic Society but moved to Vienna and Munich and contracted a close intimacy with Beethoven. Likewise Cipriani Potter (1792 – 1871) frustrated by the lack of opportunities in England moved to Vienna. Although his relationship with Beethoven was before the Mid-Victorian period its influence continued through the 1850s.

<sup>84</sup> Samuel Sebastian Wesley, *A Few Words on Cathedral Music and the Musical System of the Church, with a Plan of Reform* by W. Francis Westbrook (New York: Hinrichsen (ed.), 1961), 68-69.

<sup>85</sup> Barrington Kaye, *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain; A Sociological Study* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1960), 63-8.

country<sup>86</sup>. However, by the last quarter the number of architects serving their practice in London alone had reached 638<sup>87</sup>.

Within the liberal market economy of mid-Victorian Britain, there was a great deal of competition in which each professional practice worked hard for its survival. Unlike other cultural spheres, architecture could rely upon large public commissions that slowly moved from the old style aristocratic patronage to government and industrial bodies. For many architectural practices the income received was for sufficiency rather than wealth. The architect often relied upon a percentage fee of around 5% of the total fees and expenses paid.<sup>88</sup> The system of payment and the amount of work, therefore, provided a good income for the many and wealth for the few.

In the field of architecture there was a close relationship between Gothic revivalism and the deeply philosophical movement of Anglo-Catholicism. Although contemporary materials and construction were used, many architectural designs had considerable faithfulness to both the ornamental style and principles of construction of the medieval original. For many the term 'medieval' creates an image of an idealised moment in history - before the Reformation, when the whole of Christian Europe was united. It was in the field of architecture, and more specifically church architecture, that we witness a search for a sanctuary in the context of rapid urbanisation and overcrowding. One of the most prolific architects of Victorian Gothic revival was Sir George Gilbert Scott.

Scott operated one of the largest practices of the time. Scott's practice employed a large number of assistants working on the many

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<sup>86</sup> John Summerson, "Architecture" in Boris Ford, ed., *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, vol. 8: *The Edwardian Age & the Inter-War Years*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 43.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Colvin, Howard, "The Beginnings of the Architectural Profession in Scotland," *Architectural History, The Journal of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, 46 (2003): 176-78, accessed May 4 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1568506>.

commissions that he received. It was estimated that at one time Scott was working on nearly 500 churches, thirty-nine cathedrals and minsters, twenty-five universities and colleges and many other buildings besides.<sup>89</sup> Scott was the architect of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, which was ornately built of sandstone in the early Gothic Style. A hanging rood marks the division between nave and choir. Verona and Carrera marble were used in the decorative reredos behind the altar. He also designed St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in Dundee with its soaring spire that dominates the city's skyline.

Other committed Anglo-Catholic architects of the period include William Butterfield (7<sup>th</sup> September 1814–23 February 1900) and George Frederick Bodley (14<sup>th</sup> March 1827–21<sup>st</sup> October 1907). Butterfield's designs include Keble College, the Episcopalian Cathedral in Perth and All Saints, Margaret Street in London. All Saint's Church in London was designed in 1850 and consecrated in 1859 and was, therefore, a building that initiated the High Victorian Gothic era. Bodley was a pupil of Gilbert Scott and designed St Salvador's Church in Dundee. During this period we witness a huge church building programme in Scotland; the Free Church had built over 700 new churches by 1847, while the Church of Scotland increased its number of churches from 924 in 1843 to 1,437 by 1909<sup>90</sup>. However, it was a prominent national project in London that caught the public's imagination.

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<sup>89</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 423. Scott (1811 – 1878) was the son of a clergyman. The number of ecclesiastical buildings that he designed or renovated was immense from London to Christchurch in New Zealand. Scott designed some of the more celebrated buildings of the day: the Albert Memorial, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh.

<sup>90</sup> M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes and A. MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 234.

Charles Barry's new Palace of Westminster began in 1837 and was completed thirty years later<sup>91</sup>. The commission for the Italianate design for the rebuilding of the Whitehall offices was given to Gilbert Scott. Outside of London many new municipal buildings and town halls were built. In 1825 Manchester had put up a modest classical building for £25,000. In 1877 Waterhouse's Gothic replacement was opened at a cost of almost a million pounds. This symbolic building was to demonstrate the 'opulence of the city' and the 'great principle of self-government'<sup>92</sup>. Probably the greatest of all Victorian municipal masterpieces St Georges Hall, Lime Street Liverpool, was commissioned in 1841. The young London architect, Harvey Lonsdale Elmes, designed the Neoclassical building.

Of all the cultural activities of mid-Victorian Britain, art attracted both armies of supporters and detractors. In its time both art and exhibitions were hugely popular, The Manchester Art Exhibition attracted over one million visitors, and paintings were said to display intelligibility, confidence, common sympathies and progress. The Art Treasures of Great Britain was an exhibition of fine art held in Manchester from 5 May to 17 October 1857. It remains the largest exhibition to be held in the UK, possibly the world, with over 16,000 works on display. It attracted over 1.3 million visitors in the 142 days it was open. However, on the other-side of the argument, Victorian art is blamed for timidity, superficiality and nostalgia. Consequently, art had the ability to capture

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<sup>91</sup> Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860) was born in Bridge Street, Westminster and baptized at St Margaret's Church, Westminster. It was in Westminster that, with the help of Pugin, Barry was to design his most celebrated piece of architecture the *Palace of Westminster*. However, Barry also designed many other renowned buildings of the age including: The Reform Club, Lancaster House and Halifax Town Hall.

<sup>92</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 421.

the imagination of the modern-day society but it also had the tendency to evoke feelings and emotions for the past.

In economically liberal Britain the value that society gave to art and more particularly the artist could be measured in the artist's worth and social status. Before the 1850s artists were often sons of tradesmen and frequently enjoyed a low social status<sup>93</sup>. Nor did those few mid-Victorian artists who had begun to enjoy aristocratic hospitality do so as anything other than 'interesting' guests, invited without their wives.<sup>94</sup> Many mid-Victorian artists found it quite difficult to raise their wealth and status to match other professionals. Frank Holl had a nervous breakdown in 1888, trying to paint numerous portraits to pay for his Norman Shaw designed house.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand many painters did find great wealth; William Frith was said to have a splendid house, a governess, a son at Harrow and a second hidden house, mistress and seven children.<sup>96</sup>

Within the broad range of cultural employment it is the artist that is the most economically and socially progressive in mid-Victorian Britain. Both Charles Eastlake and Edwin Landseer moved in royal circles<sup>97</sup> and were buried at St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>98</sup> The social and financial heyday of Victorian artists was between 1850 and 1880 and in that time three artists left more than £200 000 in their will: John Linnell, John Gilbert and

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<sup>93</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 403.

<sup>94</sup> Paula Gillett, *The Victorian Painter's World* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), 32-33.

<sup>95</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 403. Frank Holl (1845–1888) was a painter born in London. Holl's portraits include some of the most important figures of the day including: Lord Roberts painted for Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cleveland and William Gladstone.

<sup>96</sup> Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London: Lund Humphries Pub. Ltd, 1993), 73-74.

<sup>97</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 404. Landseer was popular with Queen Victoria who commissioned a number of portraits for her family. Landseer was particularly associated with Scotland and the Scottish Highlands e.g. *Monarch of the Glen* (1851).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. JMW Turner (died 1851) and Landseer (1873) were buried in St Paul's Cathedral. Many writers, of course, were buried at Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Edwin Landseer.<sup>99</sup> It should be remembered, however, that not all esteemed artists earned a lot of money. Madox Brown spent many months painting the acclaimed *The English Autumn Afternoon* (1852) [Pl. 4] and only earned a few guineas. What is also evident from Brown's diaries is that he spent a lot of time worrying how he was going to feed his family.<sup>100</sup>

The most socially and financially successful artists were the ones who could adapt their paintings and give what the customer wanted. A strong relationship grew between the culture - makers and middle-class consumers. F.G. Stephens, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood<sup>101</sup> and art critic, captured this relationship well when he wrote:

'...the middle class of England has been that which has done the most for English art. While its superiors 'praised' Pietro Perugino, neglected Turner, let Wilson starve.....the merchant princes bought Turner, William Hunt, Holman Hunt and Rossetti.....'<sup>102</sup>

Many patrons of art directed the artist. James Leathart, the Gateshead industrialist, refused in the 1870s to pay for Rossetti's *Sir Tristram and La Belle Iseult* until Sir Tristram's neck had been reduced in thickness

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 407. Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) was a painter of moral and historical subjects. Probably, Brown's most famous piece of art was *Work*, which attempted to capture the totality of the Mid-Victorian social experience in a single image. Some of Brown paintings did command a high price tag including *The Last of England* (1859) [Pl. 78] that was sold for 325 Guineas. When Brown died he had unusually a secular funeral.

<sup>101</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of English painters, poets and critics founded in 1848. The group rejected the classical poses of Raphael and Michelangelo and wanted to return to the abundant detail, intense colours and complex compositions of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

<sup>102</sup> Frederic George Stephens, "English Artists of the Present Day, Sir Edwin Landseer". *Portfolio*, 1871. Stephens, 38. Frederic George Stephens (1828 – 1907) was an art critic and one of two non-artistic members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he was a loyal supporter of Holman Hunt.



and his hair in quantity, which Rossetti duly did [Pl. 5].<sup>103</sup> Even Holman Hunt, who was more renowned for his independent streak, altered the face of the woman in his famous picture *The Awakened Conscience* [Pl. 1] because the first owner found the face too painful. Hunt even changed the title from *The Awakening* to *The Awakened Conscience* [Pl. 1].

Many of the new patrons were from the industrial heartlands of Britain and their wealth directed the tastes of the art world. This relationship between the artist and middle-class consumers led to domestic realism and sentimentality. We, therefore, witness a growth in paintings where childhood, the happy cottage and home sweet home are the subject of the art<sup>104</sup>. This wish to avoid the immediate and material, in all its grimy reality, can be considered as escapism in so much that the patron has an idealised idea of family life and home, which may not be seen in the present realities of life.

On the other hand middle-class patrons often wished to avoid the realities of industrialisation. An example of this can be seen in Manchester Town Hall; whilst celebrating the civil and commercial pride of the city, paintings were chosen that were historical rather than contemporary scenes of science, education and industry<sup>105</sup>. The industrial murals illustrate historical scenes including *The Opening of the Bridgewater Canal in 1761* but these look very domestic and very clean.

Individual patrons were important but, for many artists, it was the dealers and those who held exhibitions who could really provide wealth and notoriety for the ambitious artist. Ernest Gambert bought Holman

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<sup>103</sup>Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 413.

<sup>104</sup> The phrase 'the angel in the house' originated from the writing *The Angel in the House: The Betrothal* (1854) by Coventry Patmore (1823 – 1896) and is said to indicate the domestic reality of women. Paintings include George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood* (1863) [Pl. 6] and Michael Frederick Halliday, *The Blind Basket Maker with his First Child* (1856) [Pl. 7].

<sup>105</sup> The entrance to the Town Hall has twelve exterior statues including Henry III, Elizabeth I and Saint George. The celebrated murals by Ford Madox Brown depict historical settings from the *Baptism of Edwin* to the *Expulsion of the Danes from Manchester*.

Hunt's *Finding the Saviour in the Temple* [Pl. 8] for 5,500 guineas, made £4,000 from exhibition fees, £5,000 from engravings and sold the picture for £1,500. An admission of 1 guinea was charged to members of the public to see famous works of art. Pieces of art could be shipped around the whole Empire and money could be made on exhibition fees. The international tour of Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* [Pl. 9] was hugely popular in both Australia and New Zealand.<sup>106</sup> Holman Hunt's painting expresses the artist's understanding of the moment of conversion but at the same time captures an image of Christ that is medieval. Therefore, to Hunt, the correct image of the Christ is not contemporary but is found in a moment of history.

Although it was true that many artists wanted to be both popular and socially and economically successful they did still possess a sense of independent spirit. Many artists of the time could be described as being progressive and were not held back by what had gone before. Whereas in the 1830s all but a handful had seen themselves as superior craftsmen who produced to order, by the end of the century contemporary paintings were being valued as expressions of individual and independent personalities.<sup>107</sup> Wilkie Collins described the situation in a colourful way:

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<sup>106</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 408. *The Light of the World* became the most popular representation of Christ in the English-speaking world. The owner of the painting, Charles Booth, organised that it tour Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa between 1905 and 1907. Great crowds of people queued to see the painting as it hung on various art gallery walls. J. H. Roy wrote, after seeing the painting, that, 'the vast crowd stood gazing in silent wonderment, and many in adoration, as though held by an irresistible magnet. I was, on viewing the wondrous face, impelled to uncover my head in reverence.' [www.thewords.com](http://www.thewords.com)

<sup>107</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 408.

‘These rough and ready customers were not led by rules or frightened by precedents .....Sturdily holding their own opinions.....they turned their backs valiantly on the Old Masters, and marched off in a body to the living men’.<sup>108</sup>

Many of these contemporary artists were selling their pictures for prices that resembled the ‘Old Masters’. Holman Hunt, Millais and Frith were all doing new things in the world of religious art and depictions of modern life and selling their works for large sums of money.<sup>109</sup>

Lying just beneath the surface of this confident progressive world was a deep desire for things of the past; nostalgia, therefore, played an important role in the cultural life of nineteenth century Britain. This nostalgic desire can be seen in some of the literature of the time. For example, it appears in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, when Alice encounters the White Knight<sup>110</sup>:

Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey *Through the Looking Glass*, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday — the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight — the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light that quite dazzled her — the horse quietly moving about, with the reins hanging loose on his neck, cropping the grass at her feet — and the black shadows of the forest behind — all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shadowing her eyes, she leant

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<sup>108</sup> Wilkie Collins, *A Rogue’s Life* (London: Hesperus Pr., 2006), Ch. 5. (First published in *Household Words* in 1879)

<sup>109</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 405.

<sup>110</sup> Lewis Carroll (1832 – 1898) was an English author, a mathematician and an Anglican deacon. Carroll (whose real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) was both religiously and politically conservative and inclined himself towards Anglo-Catholicism.

against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song<sup>111</sup>.

The passage develops a theme that the past is irretrievably lost but still haunts our memory forever. Carroll creates an interesting structure that skips ahead in time to predict a future nostalgia from present events – an adult for the lost childhood. In the passage there is a ‘melancholy’ in the act of remembrance; Carroll describes the setting sun gleaming through the knight’s hair as if it were a loss of happy times, but then this is contrasted with the black shadows of the forest. In doing so Carroll attributes both the positive and negative images that create the bittersweet taste that is closely associated with nostalgia. The term ‘melancholy’ creates a feeling of pensive sadness at the sense of loss from that which was ideal to the present, which is less so; a movement from a state of divine blessing to divine loss.

Horatio McCulloch (1806 - 1867) was a Scottish landscape painter whose most loyal patrons were wealthy Glasgow industrialists. During his lifetime McCulloch became the most prominent landscape painter in Scotland. His constant aim was to paint the silence of the Highland wilderness where the wild deer roam in the same romantic tradition as Wordsworth described in the fells of the Lake District. His best works include *Inverlochy Castle* (1857), *Landscape Evening* (1860), *Glencoe, Argyllshire* (1864) and *Loch Katrine* (1866). These works celebrate the romantic scenery of the Scottish Highlands and evoke a magnificent sense of scale, emphasising the dramatic grandeur. It is interesting that McCulloch’s paintings should be popular amongst the industrialists of Glasgow, such as David Hutcheson (1799 – 1881), who possibly

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<sup>111</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, Chapter 8, It’s my own Invention. [www.Literature.org](http://www.Literature.org)

regarded the Highlands as a romantic escape from the grim reality of urbanised life. McCulloch, in his works of art, was composing a landscape that was timeless in a world that was changing fast and in creating paintings on a grand scale was offering another world that was close but extraordinary different from the realism experienced by most of the population. This 'otherness' could be regarded as transcendent awe as the viewer is moved from the present reality to another place – a kind of heavenly home.

It might be thought that Victorian architects created a distinctly 'new' nineteenth –century style. In practice nostalgia played an important part in the design of structures in Victorian Britain. Buildings were designed in the style of classical and medieval revival. The internal of the house often meant that middle-class customers bought into one of the many historical fantasies that were on offer for decorating the home. These consumers bought into the belief of an idealised past and went to great lengths to purchase the correct item or antique.

From the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign until the 1860s, classical proportions, symmetry and detailing that were characteristic of the Georgian and Regency periods, was very popular. Stucco, an external render was used decoratively, and was used as a cheaper alternative for ornament and mouldings. Stucco was used to emphasise door and window surrounds and to finish decorative columns; these designs can be found in the West End of London and the many seaside resorts around the country. The internals of a house were decorated in the Grecian style but with the lack of evidence with regard to the look of a classical Greek household many manufactures copied from depictions found on Greek vases.

John Claudius Loudon encapsulated this vast array of style in his influential book *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*<sup>112</sup>. However, it was the Gothic style that Loudon famously propagated. Inspired by a romantic vision of medieval chivalry and an evocation of the days of knights, Loudon employed Gothic design in his estate buildings and whimsical follies. On the other hand Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin had more spiritual matters on his mind when he made no secret of the fact that he wished to restore pre-Reformation faith alongside his Gothic architecture. For Pugin Gothic was aligned to medieval and this represented an idealised moment in Catholic history when the nations were united by one faith. This would have been a very unpopular proposal in the minds of the general public if it were not for his magnificent Gothic interiors of the new Houses of Parliament. This demand for Gothic revival had support from one of the period's foremost commentators – John Ruskin. Ruskin in his series of *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* made the comment, 'insist upon having the pure old Gothic porch, walled in on both sides, with its pointed arch entrance and gable roof above'<sup>113</sup>.

Between 1850 and 1870 the archetypal redbrick Victorian Gothic house took shape. Gothic revival architects popularised brick and Ruskin's book *The Stones of Venice* (1851) encouraged experimentation with coloured banding for decorative effect. The internal of the household commonly reflected Gothic taste<sup>114</sup>. At the Great Exhibition (1851) Pugin represented the Gothic style with his medieval Court. Furniture sometimes represented the Gothic theme. Charles Locke Eastlake

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<sup>112</sup> John Claudius Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1839).

<sup>113</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, (New York: John Wiley, 1854), 50.

<sup>114</sup> John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1853), 21.

published *Hints on Household Taste*, which provided illustrations of his own Gothic furniture designs aimed at middle-class consumers<sup>115</sup>.

Pugin will be best remembered for his pioneering role in the Gothic Revival style. This work was profoundly influenced by his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1834. Pugin died at the age of forty following a mental breakdown; he was married three times and had six children. In this short and remarkable life Pugin had left an important mark upon both the domestic and ecclesiastical landscape of Britain but will be famously remembered for his designs for the interior of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben in London.

Rosemary Hill in her biography of Pugin describes him as a Romantic Catholic.<sup>116</sup> This was, in part, due to the small circle of friends and soul mates that Pugin was able to confide with. The most notable of Pugin's Catholic patrons was John Talbot, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury and the leading spokesperson of these 'Romantic Catholics'. However, this title could be aptly given to Pugin because it was at the heart of his work and mission. Pugin had discovered the medieval – pre-Reformation Church and believed that 'anything that is really alive acquires its outward shape from inner conditions; it develops organically' and therefore Pugin believed his architecture to be a direct expression of faith and that faith found its idealised expression in medieval Europe. According to Rosemary Hill, Pugin knew very little about the Church but rather he held to a very personal form of religion where faith was expressed through 'solitary pilgrimages among mountains and ruins'<sup>117</sup>. The romantic temperament sought an affinity between the interior self and the eternal and it was medieval Catholicism that fulfilled that

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<sup>115</sup> Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1878).

<sup>116</sup> Hill, *God's Architect*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Hill, *God's Architect*, 19.

spiritual craving. Therefore, the narratives of stained glass windows, the devotion to saints and the beauty of the Latin Mass refreshed the soul that was left parched by the state religion. Pugin and his friends had many critics as they stood firmly against the Protestant ideals of progress; John Ruskin, during his more Protestant period, disparagingly wrote of Pugin, 'he is not a great architect but one of the smallest possible or conceivable architects'<sup>118</sup>. Nevertheless Pugin did not seem to mind for he was searching for the eternal at a time of change and upheaval.

This heavenly escape is beautifully illustrated in his commission to build St Giles' Catholic Church in the town of Cheadle, north Staffordshire. Staffordshire had long developed a reputation for urban, industrial production being famously the home of the potteries where Wedgwood and other manufacturers of fine quality ceramics were found. However, in a small corner of this industrialised region Pugin built an alternative reality. St Giles Church has a broach spire that leads the eye to look upwards towards the heaven which the internal decoration will try to replicate. Pugin's church at Cheadle, despite its location in a small country town, remains one of the most admired and visited of all Victorian buildings. The high altar and reredos were carved by Thomas Roddis and they form the focal point of the entire church. On the front of the altar are carved figures of angels, holding musical instruments. On the reredos the angels hold torches and censers and the central panel shows the Coronation of Our Lady – the last of the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary and the only one which takes place entirely in heaven. This heavenly home created out of contemporary materials had the effect of creating an alternative, transcendent, reality that takes the believer to another time and place where Christendom was more pure, more ideal.

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<sup>118</sup> Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, 372.



The replacement of Neo-Classical 18<sup>th</sup> architecture with 19<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Gothic can be seen as a movement from an immanent style to a transcendent one. Gothic spires now point heavenward to complement the mystery now introduced to the liturgy as contrasted with the rationalism of much 18<sup>th</sup> century sermonising.

## 1.6 Religion

In tandem with the new forces of transformation in ecclesiastical architecture during the mid-Victorian period we also witness a change within the church both in England and Scotland. In Scotland we observe the Disruption of 1843, which created a schism with the established Church of Scotland. Throughout the United Kingdom there is a huge growth of Roman Catholicism largely through Irish immigration that leads to the Catholic Emancipation in 1829<sup>119</sup>. In Oxford we observe a movement that was to have profound effect on the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in Scotland.

The Disruption of 1843 was a schism within the established Church of Scotland where 450 ministers broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland<sup>120</sup>. There was always unease in the established Church between being both the national Church of the Scottish people and having the inherent right to exercise independent jurisdiction over its own affairs. This independence was established by John Knox, placed into legislation in 1689 and re-affirmed at the Act of Union in 1707<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> The Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) permitted members of the Roman Catholic Church to sit in the parliament at Westminster.

<sup>120</sup> Nigel M. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish History and Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). The best single volume account of The Disruption of 1843: Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption 1843*, (Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace, 1893).

<sup>121</sup> The Claim of Right Act (1689) reduced the royal prerogative, enhanced the position of parliament and provided greater autonomy for the protestant faith in Scotland. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish History and Theology*, 67.

The main point of contention that stoked the fire of this unease was the right of 'patronage', the right of a wealthy patron to install a minister of their choice into a parish. The main split was between those who believed that this was the inherent right of the state Church and those who believed that it infringed onto the spiritual independence of the Church. This unease was brought into sharp focus when in 1834 the Evangelical party held a majority in the General Assembly for the first time in a century. One of the immediate actions of the evangelical party was to pass the *Veto Act*, which gave parishioners the right to reject a minister nominated by their patron.

The first test for the new Act came in the small town of Auchterarder in Perth and Kinross. The parish rejected the patron's nominee and refused to ordain Robert Young. Young then appealed to the Court of Session arguing that the Church had acted beyond its powers and infringed the statutory rights of patrons. The court went on to state that the established Church was a creation of the State and derived its legitimacy by an Act of Parliament. This infuriated the Evangelicals as it contradicted the right to claim that Jesus Christ and not the King or Parliament was to be its sole head. Therefore, on the 18 May 1843, 121 ministers and 73 elders left the Church of Scotland to establish the Free Church of Scotland. A further meeting was held on the 23 May for the Signing of the Act of Separation and in all 450 evangelical ministers broke away. The contingent of ministers included nearly all the Gaelic-speakers, the missionaries and most of the Highlanders. Those who left the established Church were to pay a great price, livings, manses and pulpits all had to be forfeited. However, the founding of a new national Church from scratch required a great deal of zeal and energy, which provided vision and new hope for many of the supporters. By 1847, 700

new churches and Manses were built. Many of the first generation of ministers and teachers were Evangelical and strong proponents of Westminster Calvinism<sup>122</sup>. However, as the century drew to an end a more liberal understanding of the faith began to attach itself to the Free Church<sup>123</sup>.

The 1843 Disruption in Scotland was caused by the Free Church's rebellion against patronage in the established Church of Scotland. No longer were landlords to decide who the minister should be. Instead the decision should be by the congregation acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with the minister feeling the 'call' to that particular parish. Consequently, the divine came closer to the everyday and was willing to be affected by human subjects. If great upheavals were happening in the Church of Scotland then a movement was taking place in Oxford that would have profound consequences for the Christian religion throughout the United Kingdom.

The Oxford Movement began in the early 1830s with a perceived attack by the reforming Whig administration on the structure and revenues of the established Church in Ireland. Keble attacked the Irish Church Temporalities Bill (1833)<sup>124</sup> in his Assize Sermon in Oxford, calling the proposals a 'national apostasy'. The Oxford Movement was a group of High Church Anglicans that eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism. It was also known as the Tractarian Movement after its

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<sup>122</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith was drawn up by the 1646 Westminster Assembly and remains the 'subordinate standard' of doctrine in the Church of Scotland and has had great influence on the Presbyterian Church worldwide. The Confession is a Reformed Confessions of faith and is a systematic exposition of Calvinist orthodoxy. Alan Rodger, *The Courts, the Church and the Constitution: Aspects of the Disruption of 1843*. (Edinburgh: EUP, 2008).

<sup>123</sup> Biblical criticism was being taught by William Robert Smith including *The Prophets of Israel and their Place in History, to the Close of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.* (Edinburgh: A & C. Black, 1895).

<sup>124</sup> The Church Temporalities Act 1833 was an Act of Parliament, which undertook major reorganisation of the Church of Ireland, then the established church in Ireland. The Act suppressed ten bishoprics and merged the corresponding dioceses.

series of publications *Tracts for The Times* published between 1833 and 1841<sup>125</sup>. Prominent members of the movement included John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, John Keble, Robert Wilberforce and Charles Marriott. These men from Oxford desired to 're-assert the authority of the Church, to adhere to the liturgy and the rubrics; and to claim that the Thirty-Nine Articles were a significant part of the authority of their Church'<sup>126</sup>.

In his introduction to the Oxford Movement, Owen Chadwick claims that the High Church group of the eighteenth century gave birth to the Tractarians of the 1830s and 40s<sup>127</sup>. On the other hand what happened in Oxford was radically different to what had gone before; this decade of revolution in the Church of England was something that seemed to engage the heart as well as the mind. Peter Nockles seems to be closer to the truth by demonstrating that the Oxford Movement wanted to pull the Church of England from its present reality to another time – to a 'golden' period of the Church's life. Nockles claims that the Oxford Movement regarded the Church of England as a kind of Noah's Ark, full of beasts clean and unclean. Therefore, according to Nockles, the Tractarians were highly selective in associating the High Church Movement almost:

'exclusively with a portion of the seventeenth century and in their doctrine of justification were forced to limit their appeal to a mere thirty-year period following the Restoration in 1660. Thereafter, the Tractarians maintained there

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<sup>125</sup> The term 'Tractarian' which soon became the most widely employed as a description of followers of the Oxford Movement, was first coined by the then Master of the Temple, Christopher Benson, in a sermon at the Temple church in 1839.

<sup>126</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, 1960, London, A. And C. Black Ltd, p. 54.

<sup>127</sup> Chadwick, 11. No party label has been more subject to misapplication than that of 'High Church'. As J. C. D. Clark has observed, 'the Victorian conception of High Church was one largely drawn from the Oxford Movement'. J.C.D Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1986), 109.

was a 'tunnel period' in the history of the tradition from about 1689 until the apparent dawn of the Oxford Movement in 1833'<sup>128</sup>.

At the heart of this appeal to the seventeenth century were the maintenance of the apostolic ministry and the authority of the early Church and the Fathers.

This is an important moment in the thesis with regard to its claim to history and its relation to transcendence. The feeling of nostalgia might create a general yearning for the past but the Oxford Movement was appealing to specific moments in history. Therefore, the Oxford Movement looked towards the early Church Fathers (as the theological and ecclesiological foundation of the Church), the Restoration of the Catholic King, Charles II and the Caroline Divines<sup>129</sup>. It is at these high points, according to the Oxford Movement, that the transcendent God communicated His will to the Church and the greater human condition. Therefore, the contemporary Christian believer might appeal to the devotional writings, theological propositions or visual images of Christ from those periods.

If the Tractarians wished to dislocate the current Church of England from the present to a 'heavenly kingdom' of the past the subsequent Anglo- Catholic and Ritualist revival wished to bring that 'heavenly kingdom' closer to home<sup>130</sup>. It would again be a mistake to

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<sup>128</sup> Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship (1760 – 1857)*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 3. Nockles makes the case that 'for evangelicals, the eighteenth century was to be faulted for not sufficiently preaching the Gospel; for Tractarians, for losing sight of catholic principle and practice'.

<sup>129</sup> For the Oxford Movement the Church Fathers were regarded as the theological and ecclesiological foundation of the Church. Charles II (1630 -1685) was made King of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1649 and was a Catholic monarch. The Caroline Divines was considered the 'golden age' of Anglican Scholarship and devotional writing. Curthoys, M.C., Brock, M.G., *Nineteenth Century Oxford*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>130</sup> The label 'Anglo Catholic' also underwent transmutation. The original meaning of 'Anglo Catholic', like that of 'Anglican', had been a descriptive term for mere membership of the Church of England, and was of seventeenth-century lineage. The term could be used interchangeably with

regard the shift from the Oxford Movement to the Victorian Anglo-Catholic revival as a seamless transition. Pusey, a member of both movements, remarked, 'We are united in friendship, but the movements were unconnected with each other'<sup>131</sup>. On the other hand Bentley is probably accurate when he states, 'A movement that from the start looked for inspiration to church history, as the Tractarians did, was bound to bring about liturgical change'<sup>132</sup>. This liturgical change was dramatic during the last half of the nineteenth century. At the annual meeting of the English Church Union in 1875 it was agreed that the ritualist clergy should adopt six main points: vestments, the eastward position, altar lights, the mixture of water and wine in the chalice at Holy Communion, wafer bread and incense<sup>133</sup>.

The Oxford Movement was disapproved of because of its 'Romanising' tendency but it had a lasting effect on the theology and practice of Anglicanism, especially with the development of Anglo-Catholicism. Therefore, the Oxford Movement indirectly led to the establishment of Anglican religious orders, brought about a greater use of ceremony and symbolism into the Church's life and gradually the Eucharist became more prominent with priests wearing vestments. Many Anglo-Catholic priests worked in the slums. Their new ministries developed a critique of British social policy at both a local and national level. The Christian Social Union<sup>134</sup> was formed where issues such as the

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'Anglican'. How the non-party meaning of the term endured well into the nineteenth century was witnessed by Newman's use of the phrase 'Anglo Catholic Church' in his Lectures on *the Prophetic Office of the Church*, p. 21. Later generations of the Oxford Movement's followers, including the 'Ritualists' would claim the term 'Anglo Catholic' exclusively for themselves.

<sup>131</sup> Edward Bouverie Pusey, *The Proposed Ecclesiastical Legislation*, 1874, p. 35.

<sup>132</sup> James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain*, OUP, 1978, p. 26.

<sup>133</sup> G. R. Prynne, *The Eucharistic Manual* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), 1866, p. 15. 'Six Points' in *the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1974, p. 1281.

<sup>134</sup> The Christian Social Union was established in Oxford on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1889. The group was formed to study contemporary social conditions and the remedying of poverty.

just wage, the system of property renting, infant mortality and industrial conditions were debated.

## 1.7 Science and Religion

The Oxford Movement represented a search into the historical past to find solidity in a rapidly changing environment. I would like to highlight in this next section how progress, represented by science, appeared to undermine many of the fundamental tenets that the received Christian faith was founded upon and therefore uncover a major tension at the heart of Victorian life. Darwin, in the context of wider scientific discoveries and as an exemplar, will be explored<sup>135</sup>. A distinct response from the Church of England to the ideals of progress will be considered. However, it is important to examine the differences in science when comparing the nineteenth century with the contemporary context before we explore the issues above.

Science in Victorian times conjures romantic images of individual gentlemen making discoveries and taming nature<sup>136</sup>; during the nineteenth century the notion of political patronage for science was very scarce. There was no national commitment to the teaching of science and progress to the profession was mainly due to individual initiative and the demands of the market. In mid-Victorian Britain the emphasis in education was to provide gentlemen for the ruling-class and examinations

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<sup>135</sup> Darwin is one of the factors leading to religious uncertainty and a longing for the securities of the past. Equally important was the transformation of Britain into an industrial society where the churches found it hard to keep up with the movement of the population into the cities, but also of considerable importance was the serious challenge posed by the kind of biblical scholarship that migrated from Germany, now treating historical questions raised by the Bible like any other. Later in the century Lightfoot and Westcott do much to reassure the anxious public, though this is the main factor in quite a few people's loss of faith, including George Eliot. The thesis, therefore, uses Darwin as an exemplar but recognises that the actual situation is more complex.

<sup>136</sup> Charles Babbage, for example, was an astonishingly original and innovative thinker in Victorian Britain. Many innovations and contributions are attributed to him, including his ideas for machines to perform mathematical calculations and the far more ambitious *analytical engines* that were flexible punch-card controlled general calculators. He produced a table of logarithms of the natural numbers from 1 to 108000.

were set to test the abilities of a future civil servant rather than physicists or chemists for the Universities<sup>137</sup>. So we should recognise that the world of science has changed dramatically. Teams of University scientists often work at a micro-level of investigation to transform ideas into mass-produced products<sup>138</sup>. The costs of such investigation have risen to such an extent that today science is very much part of politics. Therefore, nation states and multi-national organisations have invested in science to such an extent that they are now part of the national and global power complex.

Science in the nineteenth century seemed to be both admired and feared. The admiration of science was connected to the 'cult of progress' where new goods were being produced and transported across the globe to what seemed to be the benefit of the whole nation and indeed civilisation itself. However, science also seemed to be feared. This fear went beyond the claims of Matthew Arnold who saw a danger that the teaching of science might side-line the liberal arts<sup>139</sup>. Rather this fear was implicit within the ideas of progress and was concerned with popular thought and imagination. The fear was whether the findings of science could be reconciled with the historic doctrines of faith laid down by the divine. This had deep cosmological implications. What was at stake, with regards theology, was the questioning of the belief in the transcendent

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<sup>137</sup> The Victorian period seems to have spurned many individuals who tried to run away from an 'orthodox' career path to meddle with the issues of science and discovery. Samuel Butler (1835 -1902) was an iconoclastic Victorian author who published a variety of works. Two of his most famous pieces are *Erewhon* and the posthumous novel *The Way of All Flesh*. He is also known for examining Christian orthodoxy and evolutionary studies. However, the pattern of his life seems to stem from the fact that Butler was attempting to run away from the family tradition of ordination into the Church of England.

<sup>138</sup> This of course was predicted by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* where he argues that economic growth is rooted in the increasing division of labour. This idea relates primarily to the specialisation of the labour force, essentially breaking down large jobs into many tiny components. Under this regime each worker becomes an expert in one isolated area of production, therefore increasing that person's efficiency.

<sup>139</sup> R.H. Super, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (edit), (Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962), 240. Of course Arnold was a supporter of science in itself and claimed that 'in Newton there was a genius of the highest order'.



and a search for accommodation with regards new discoveries with an increased emphasis upon the immanent.

In the nineteenth century, therefore, scientific rationalism was in many circumstances applied to society. To choose 'right' from 'wrong' or the best way to progress could be best determined by acquiring the facts and then scientifically exploring the best way to act. Using scientific rational thinking, progress was assured and could only be hindered by ignorance, false doctrine and anachronistic institutions. Such dominant progressive attitudes alarmed conservatives, the orthodox and those who put faith in ancient regimes. Therefore, in the public sphere, a new theological framework needed to be found – one that could affirm progress but at the same time retain the historic faith.

This rational scientific approach to understanding had no limits. The critical study of sources, which were started in Germany, was applied to both the Bible and the doctrines of the church to such an extent that every fact, every parable and every incident in the Gospels was critically examined<sup>140</sup>. The fear for many was not that scholars might re-interpret the Bible but whether they might claim that the stories of Genesis were figments of the imagination. And there were to be no limits placed upon this discovery. In a philosophical sense the freedom to question and doubt was at the heart of the progressive movement.

John Stuart Mill in his essay *On Liberty*<sup>141</sup> makes the dual claim that repression and restraint frustrate human beings and that it is only in a free society that humans can discover truth and cherish it. This plea for

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<sup>140</sup> Ideas were imported to Britain by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and in particular, by George Eliot's translations of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854).

<sup>141</sup> John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) released *On Liberty* in 1859. The limitations, Mill argued, to a person's freedom should be based upon the harm principle. The harm principle holds that each individual has the right to act as he wants, so long as these actions do not harm others.

freedom appealed to the intelligentsia who wanted intellectual liberty to pursue the findings of new scientific discovery and that no bishop or country clergyman should hinder that pursuit. This intelligentsia was gaining power and was filling the Civil Service of the Empire, providing teachers for the Public Schools and was contributing to the vast number of new periodicals.

The need to vigorously defend the Christian tradition in a nation that was essentially supportive of the Church was to implicitly elucidate the grumblings that were taking place beneath the veneer of Christian Britain. Whilst the nation demonstrated the confidence of the Christian faith through her established churches, the relatively high Church attendance exhibited, the exportation of Christian civilisation to the world and the unity of the common purpose, was beginning to fracture. For the Victorian the story of humanity was very Euro-centric. Christianity was the centre of the civilised world that brought a blessing to other continents and rescued them from barbarism.

However, in 1859 Darwin published the *Origin of the Species* and was part of the process that upset this neat and tidy view of the world. Darwin linked humanity's development to nature. Slowly the pre-history of the human-race was being written. This led to a greater interest in the study of the past where great civilisations developed and flourished. Therefore, the argument progressed; if cultures of different periods could prosper then what prevented contemporary civilisations from thriving. A natural dichotomy seemed to have arisen; are we to judge things historically, in relation to their age and the stage of evolution they have reached? Or are we to judge them against the standards of our own Christian culture that has its own standards of good and bad? If the process of Christian civilisation was being thrown into doubt then also we

notice that the belief in the transcendent and Christian orthodoxy was being questioned.

By orthodox Christianity I am referring to those things that are seen to be deposited by God and re-affirmed at the Reformation and continued to be accepted by the whole Church: the inspiration and Divine authority of the whole Canonical Scriptures, as not only containing but being the Word of God; and the truths to which they point, for example, divine creation as described in the Book of Genesis. I am not inferring in this description that every individual Christian, with one voice, ascribed to the orthodox position but rather it was where the vast majority of clerics and laity alike gravitated.

It is also recognised that Darwin was not the only critical voice impacting on the orthodox Christian view. Rather Darwin, I suggest, should be regarded as a culmination of voices that were being spoken and that challenged the received understanding of the creation story in Genesis. Fifteen years before the *Origin* was published Robert Chambers, a Scot and a man of sincere piety, wrote the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* and in 1830 Sir Charles Lyell produced his *Principles of Geology*, all bringing to question the origins of life.

It could also be claimed that it was not from Darwin but rather from within the Christian tradition itself that the transcendent and 'orthodox' understanding of Scriptures suffered the most. In *Essays and Reviews* (1860) the theological liberal Benjamin Jowett affirmed that the Bible should be read 'like any other book'<sup>142</sup>. While Darwin did not

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<sup>142</sup> *Essays and Reviews* (1860) comprised of seven essayists, six of them were clergymen from the established church, identified with the Liberal Anglican movement. Two writers especially received criticism from the 'orthodox' church: Rowland Williams who claimed that the Pentateuch was a compilation of gradual growth; that Isaiah 40 -56 was not written by Isaiah of Jerusalem but much later and that the Book of Daniel was not authentic history and belonged to the second not the sixth century

directly attack Moses, Bishop Colenso attacked traditional understanding of his authority, revealing the composite writings of the Pentateuch and its untrustworthiness as a historical record.<sup>143</sup>

Darwin was just one of many voices that were beginning to emerge in mid-Victorian Britain that were questioning the foundations on which orthodox Christianity was built. However, it was Darwin that seems to have captured and rallied the public imagination. It was as if Darwin was the prism that sucked in all other claims and on the other side provided the colourful rays of an alternative world. The influence of Darwin was expressed by Samuel Butler in *Life and Habit* (1878):

Less than twenty years ago we never met with, or heard of, anyone who accepted evolution;.....unless it was that some one now and again said that there was a very dreadful book going about like a rampant lion, called 'vestiges of Creation'. Yet, now, who seriously disputes the main principles of evolution? It is not he who first conceives an idea.....but he who makes the people accept the main conclusion.....who has done the greatest work as regards the promulgation of an opinion. And this is what Mr Darwin has done for evolution.<sup>144</sup>

Therefore, if Darwin was the main focal point for both a rallying cry for those who questioned orthodoxy and the resultant furore from the Church then we must unravel what Darwin said, in the context of his time that caused such an outpouring of emotion. The first thing to note is that it was not Darwin's intention to bring science into conflict with theology

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B.C. and Henry B. Wilson argued that the Sixth of the Thirty-nine Articles in no way indicated that the Biblical books were 'miraculously inspired'.

<sup>143</sup> John Williams Colenso (1814 – 1883), Bishop of Natal, published *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* in parts between 1862 and 1879. In one chapter based on Joshua chapter 8 verses 34 and 35, he considered how Moses could have read all the book of the Law before all the Congregation of Israel, a company he calculated on the basis of Exodus chapter 12 to be 'not much less than two millions'.

<sup>144</sup> Samuel Butler, *Life and Habit*, (London: Trubner & Co., 1878), 276, accessed on August 2009 at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6138>.

and undermine personal belief. In response to Pusey's sermon *Un-Science, Not Science, Adverse to Faith* (1878) Darwin wrote:

'Dr Pusey was mistaken in imagining that I wrote the 'Origin' in any relation whatever to theology. I should have thought that this would have been evident to anyone who had taken the trouble to read the book. I may add, that many years ago, when I was collecting facts for the 'Origin' my belief in what is called a personal God was as firm as that of Dr Pusey..' <sup>145</sup>.

Darwin himself was a country gentleman of ample means, retiring habits and a great passion for natural history. The *Origin* had not been written to attack the Church or Christianity <sup>146</sup>. However, those who espoused progressive thinking placed as a central exhibit the works of Darwin.

Darwin does argue consistently through the *Origin of the Species* that species were not supernaturally created either in the beginning or at many successive geological epochs. Darwin asks, '...do creationists really believe that at innumerable periods in the earth's history certain elemental atoms have been commanded suddenly to flash into living tissues?' The main argument through the *Origin* is that certain facts about the natural world become explainable using the theory of natural selection. On the existence of rudimentary organs Darwin writes, 'On the view of each organism with all its separate parts having been specially created, how utterly inexplicable is it that organs bearing the plain stamp

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<sup>145</sup> *Unscience, Not Science, Adverse to Faith* was a sermon preached before the University of Oxford. Oxford: James Parker, on the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, 1878. [www.anglicanhistory.org](http://www.anglicanhistory.org)

<sup>146</sup> Darwin's family tradition was nonconformist Unitarianism but his baptism and boarding school were Church of England. On board the *Beagle* Darwin was quite orthodox and would quote the bible on ship. From around 1849 Darwin would go for a walk on Sundays while his family attended church. However, when his daughter Annie died in 1851 it was said that Darwin's faith in Christianity dwindled. Darwin in his own words in 1879 declared, 'I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of God – I think generally...an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind'. [Darwin to John Fordyce, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1879. Letter 12041, cited August 2009 <http://darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-12041>]

of inutility , such as the teeth in the embryonic calf.....should so frequently occur. Nature may be said to have taken pains to reveal her scheme of modification, by means of rudimentary organs but we are too blind to understand her meaning.' The command that best seems to sum up Darwin's argument is, 'multiply, vary, let the strong live and the weakest die.' In these words Darwin describes the tendency of all offspring to vary slightly from their parents and how all creatures are in a struggle for existence. To many it might have seemed that Darwin was proposing an alternative world-view in contrast to the orthodox teachings of the Church.

However, not all Christian voices at the time were hostile to Darwin's proposals. In Darwin's concluding thoughts in the 1859 publication he notes that, '...a celebrated author and divine [Charles Kingsley] has written to me that "he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conceptions of the Deity to believe that he created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that he required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the actions of His laws"'; however, among the Liberal Anglicans, for instance, there seemed little intellectual engagement with Darwin's theories. Dr Arnold and Hare were dead, Stanley had passed his heights of scholarly vigour and Jowett was on the defensive in Oxford. On the whole the immediate reaction of the church to Darwin was both hostile and defensive.

Probably the most notorious review of Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* was given by Bishop Wilberforce in the *Quarterly* (July 1860). Wilberforce, in his article, initially compliments Darwin for his powers of observation but then goes on to question his theory of natural selection.

Bishop Wilberforce attacks the idea that transmutations can ever occur and asks, 'Is it credible that all favourable varieties of turnips are tending to become men?'<sup>147</sup> To Wilberforce, Darwin had offered a 'degrading notion of the brute origin of him who was created in the image of God'<sup>148</sup> and that it was scripture and not science that represented the best 'moral and spiritual condition of men.'<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, Wilberforce states that this new theory is based upon the 'merest of hypothesis'<sup>150</sup> and supported by unsubstantiated assumptions: facts of nature cannot contradict Revelation, for the God of nature and the God of Revelation are the same.<sup>151</sup>

If this were a view from the Church hierarchy then how would sections of the Church of England respond, what would the Tractarian party say? It may appear that there is some common ground between the Tractarianism party and the progressive movements of the nineteenth century; both were trying to claim that development was part of their creed<sup>152</sup>. However, in part, the Oxford Movement was trying to claim ecclesiological orthodoxy and Pusey may not have objected to 'transformist' theories but he did protest at any suggestion that God was to be left out of the 'beginning'. For Pusey it was not that he felt that Darwin's writings were atheistic but rather he regarded that the essence of

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<sup>147</sup> Samuel Wilberforce, "Review of the Origin of Species, by means of Natural Selection; or the preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life. By Charles Darwin, M.A., F.R.S." *Quarterly Review* 108 (1860): 214-274, accessed on August 2009 at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/>

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> In more recent years there has been a more balanced appraisal of Wilberforce's contribution to the evolution debate....an example of this re-appraisal is Ian Hesketh, *Of Apes and Ancestors: Evolution, Christianity and the Oxford Debate*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Hesketh, in his book, depicts Wilberforce's opposition to the Origin as an episode in a broader Victorian intellectual crisis and refrains from an over simplistic one side against the other.

<sup>152</sup> Ever since John Keble preached his 'national apostasy' sermon at St Mary's Oxford the Tractarian movement tried to 'progress' their ideas through the publication of the Oxford Tracts. Issues raised in the early tracts included the Apostolic Succession through the laying on of hands; the assertion that the Church of England is part of the Catholic Church.

Darwinism was to eliminate God from the discourse. Pusey connects the loss of spiritual perception with the narrowing effects of specialisation; he quotes from Newman, 'that any one study exclusively pursued, deadens in the mind the interest and the perception of any other...' <sup>153</sup>. It seems that in later life Darwin might have confessed to this when he wrote that he was unable to appreciate music, poetry and landscape.

It was not only from the established churches that Darwin received a hostile press but also from the Free Church and Roman Catholic Church. James Duns in an article in the *North British Review* (May 1860) argued that Darwin's 'transformism' is a romance and a myth. Duns' argument was that humans can artificially select for domestic plants and animals but nature cannot do likewise. For Duns, Darwin had reverted to polytheism and replaced God with the 'goddess of natural selection' and eliminated Divine revelation. Duns states, 'Mr Darwin's work is in direct antagonism to all the findings of natural theology...; and it does open violence to everything which the Creator Himself has told us in the Scriptures of truth, of the methods and results of His working.' <sup>154</sup> From the Roman Catholic standpoint *The Rambler* (March 1860) provided a high scholastic refutation of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* <sup>155</sup>. The *Rambler* took umbrage at the claim that living things were not formed by creation but rather through accidental improvements <sup>156</sup>. The Roman

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<sup>153</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859, accessed July 2009, <http://www.archive.org/stream/a618569500newmuoft>.

<sup>154</sup> John Duns. *Review of the Origin of Species*. *North British Review* 32 (May 1860): 455 – 486. *The North British Review* was founded in 1844 by members of the Free Church of Scotland as a Scottish 'national review' for those unsatisfied with the secular *Edinburgh Review*.

<sup>155</sup> *The Rambler* was a Catholic periodical founded by liberal converts to Catholicism and closely associated with the names of Lord Acton, Richard Simpson and, for a brief period, Cardinal Newman.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Simpson states, 'The idea of these writers was, that the change took place by a spontaneous adaption of organs to circumstances. The monkey's tail would wear off, and his hind hands became



Catholic journal rebutted the claim that all life developed from one primal organism. Like Pusey, the problem was not that evolution could not take place but rather that it needed to be acknowledged that it was God that conferred the powers through cell or egg or seed.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the tensions that existed in Victorian Britain with special reference to politics, economics, society, culture, religion and science. It has been demonstrated that these tensions were brought about by the immense upheavals brought about by the forces of progress and the resulting reaction of regression. What has been surprising in this survey is in what form the response to progress displayed itself. It appears that the reaction to changes in Victorian Britain took the form of consistently seeking solace in another place. More often than not this 'other place' was a period in history. In the case of the Oxford Movement the patristic period was regarded as a kind of 'golden period' of theological thought whilst in terms of society and economics this was the more stable agricultural based life of the eighteenth century. On other occasions this yearning for another place took the shape of creating another world – a kind of heaven in the face of the hell of urbanisation. I have also related, cautiously, these tensions of progress and regression to the theological concepts of transcendence and immanence.

In the next part of the thesis two artists, William McTaggart and William Dyce, will be studied in order to uncover whether the tensions in Victorian life impinge on their work, to see how they deal in their artistic

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feet, when he took to sitting and walking, and became man'. Richard Simpson, "Darwin on the Origin of the Species", *The Rambler* (March 1860): 361.

life with the twin forces of progress and regression and to discover how they cope, within their Christian life and with the changing theological framework. I will try to bring to light whether McTaggart and Dyce convey in their art 'divine immanence' where the artist paints the everyday, the immediate and the material, human society as it is found. From a different perspective I will try to unearth aspects of 'divine transcendence' in their art where they move beyond the material object and experience God as majestic, other and specific moments of historic revelation.

## Chapter 2: William McTaggart

### 2.1 The Life of William McTaggart

William McTaggart was born on 25 October 1835 at Aros in Kintyre and was baptised three days later<sup>157</sup>. The Gaelic name *McTaggart* means 'son of a priest' and it appears that the twin influences of his Gaelic upbringing and the Christian faith were to have an important influence upon William's life.

McTaggart's parents were both Gaelic speakers; Caw, the earliest biographer and son in law of William, reminds us that the family came from a 'race of small farmers and crofters, in whose veins a strain of seafaring blood mingled'<sup>158</sup>. Barbara McTaggart (or Barbra Brolochan) came from an old Kintyre family who had originated from Ulster in Northern Ireland<sup>159</sup>. Dugald McTaggart is described on the birth certificate as a Labourer. Caw tells us that both Barbra and Dugald gained a meagre income by 'leasing a stretch of moss on which, with the occasional help of hired labour, they dug and prepared peats for sale to the distilleries in Campbeltown'<sup>160</sup>, where they were used in the preparation of the malt'<sup>161</sup>. Errington, author of a revised biography of McTaggart, makes the case that a year after William's birth the family were forced to move from Aros to The Flush, another small holding, where Dugald had an 'equally unsuccessful time' in his labours<sup>162</sup>.

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<sup>157</sup> The McTaggart family lived in a small-holding on Aros Moss between Campbeltown and Machrihanish. Today Aros is a collection of fields to the east of Campbeltown airport.

<sup>158</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 15

<sup>160</sup> Campbeltown is situated on the east coast of the Kintyre peninsula.

<sup>161</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 15.

In trying to give the title ‘genius’ to McTaggart Caw paints a mystical image that is wrapped up in religious language. In attempting to state that genius is not from a person’s social position at birth he compares the ‘purple’ of a Roman governor with the ‘bed of straw’ from the infant narratives of Jesus. In trying to speak of the ‘inspiration’ of McTaggart Caw draws a picture of a ‘wind that bloweth’ and ‘listeth’ on a person as if the Spirit came from a Pentecost of the past. But it appears that when the history of the McTaggart family is traced it is indeed steeped in the Christian faith. From McTaggart’s maternal side a Donald O’Brolchan signed his name on a capital in Iona Abbey and a John O’Brolchan worked at Ardchattan Priory in 1500<sup>163</sup>. This Christian faith of the ancestors was alive in both Dugald and Barbra McTaggart who were both ‘deeply religious and were touched with the fervour which issued in the Disruption of 1843’<sup>164</sup>. Towards the end of his biography Caw describes McTaggart as a deeply religious man and that the book he knew and loved the best was the Bible<sup>165</sup>.

### 2.1.1 The Young William McTaggart

As a young boy William McTaggart grew up in Campbeltown with his mother and father and his four brothers and sisters – Duncan, Archibald, Dugald and Barbara. His father, Dugald McTaggart, was a singularly silent man who worked hard with his hands to provide a simple living for his family. Dugald, from the town, worked the peats on Aros

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<sup>163</sup> This is referred to in the history of *Clan Donald*, ‘A column on the south-east under the tower of St Mary’s has the inscription *Donaldu O’Brolchan fecit hoc opus*. Here we see the well-known O’Brolchan, members of whose family were prominent bishops and abbots in the Isles and Ireland. Donald J. MacDonald, *Clan Donald*, (Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2008), 444.

<sup>164</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 3.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

Moss and tramped with a horse and cart in the neighbourhood. William's mother, Barbra, was practical, a good manager and a strict disciplinarian who supported her husband and cared for the children.

With such a large family to care for Barbra sent the three eldest sons to school. At the age of four William attended first a local school and then moved to an establishment founded by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. William, as a young boy, enjoyed a large amount of freedom; Caw tells us that he, '...tramped the countryside with his companions.....and enjoyed many a fine sail in boats, not always borrowed with the permission of their owners'<sup>166</sup>.

At the age of twelve William McTaggart left school and became apprenticed to Dr Buchanan as an apothecary at No. 9 Long Row, Campbeltown. The apprenticeship was for four years and William was paid 'half-a-crown a week and his dinner on Sundays'<sup>167</sup>. During the time William worked for Dr Buchanan he produced a number of portraits in crayon, water-colour or oil and received commissions that varied from '10s 6d to £3'<sup>168</sup>. It had become apparent that during this time the youthful McTaggart wanted to become an artist but was unsure how to go about it; one possibility was to juggle his commitments of working in a chemist shop in Glasgow with training to be an artist, as this letter to his brother indicates:

'I don't think that an apothecary would give me any time for myself, but I will try. As to patronage, I have not the least doubt but what I will get some portraits to execute among the Campbeltown young men that are in Glasgow. There is one or two bespoke, and as my portraits are seen the rest will be

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 7.

wanting theirs done also – no doubt they will give the job to me before they will give it to a Glasgow artist, as they charge enormously...I can get plenty of work here , but I may get into bad habits in drawing, so that I need a few months studying under efficient teachers'<sup>169</sup>.

In the middle of February 1852 the fledgling artist arrived in Glasgow and shared lodgings with his brother Duncan. Dr Buchanan had provided a letter of introduction which he was to present to an *efficient teacher* Daniel Macnee, RSA who was a renowned portrait painter and later the President of the Royal Scottish Academy. We are told by Caw that Macnee advised McTaggart that the facilities in Glasgow were inadequate and that he should move to Edinburgh and join the Trustees' Academy<sup>170</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1852 William McTaggart enrolled as a student at the Academy under the headship of Robert Scott Lauder.

The Christian faith was an important influence upon the life of the young William McTaggart. Caw tells us that the only rival to McTaggart's hope to become an artist was a 'wish to become a missionary in the foreign field'<sup>171</sup>. As already noted both of William's parents were deeply religious. After the Disruption of 1843 Dugald and Barbra aligned themselves with the Free Church that stressed individual salvation and wanted a separation of Church and State. William must have wrestled with the developments in the Free Church. For many of the Free Church congregations the Bible and sermon were central to worship and the only participation by the congregation was the singing of psalms. However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn singing was introduced in some

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<sup>169</sup> National Library of Scotland (Acc. 11157/2), 15<sup>th</sup> January 1852.

<sup>170</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 8. (Sir) Daniel Macnee had previously studied in Edinburgh at the Trustee's Academy and would have been an ideal person to introduce McTaggart to the Lauder School.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

churches and even organs were introduced. Various clerical trials allowed a watered down versions for the Westminster Confession and also the rejection of the infallibility of scripture<sup>172</sup>. Since McTaggart did not leave the Church one can assume that he accepted these changes and in some way his art suggests a confident assertion that the majestic nature of God could be defended despite these changes.

Possibly, the most important influence on the development of the young McTaggart's mind was Dr Buchanan. In his obituary in *The Campbeltown Courier*<sup>173</sup> it was noted that Dr Buchanan had intense sympathy with the Evangelical party in the Scottish Church and was an Elder in the Free Church. It would have been highly probable, according to Errington that McTaggart's parents would have known Dr Buchanan and were placing their son with a 'master whose principles they respected'<sup>174</sup>. Nevertheless, it appears that Dr Buchanan's Christian influence was different from the 'deeply religious austere ideals' that he found at home<sup>175</sup>. Caw makes the point that the learned doctor brought the young McTaggart into contact with a 'broader and more liberal culture' that '... tended to widen his horizon and liberalise his mind; and gave him the confidence to follow the promptings of his own awakening artistic instincts'<sup>176</sup>. These are interesting comments made by Caw considering Dr Buchanan and McTaggart's parents had the same denominational allegiance.

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<sup>172</sup> Rodger, *The Courts*, 131.

<sup>173</sup> The Campbeltown Courier, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1886

<sup>174</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 16.

<sup>175</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 6.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 6

This new kind of thinking seemed to inspire the young McTaggart to want to leave the traditions of his family and the conventions of the community in which he was brought up. During this phase of his life he often was brought into conflict with the apparent 'narrow' thinking of the local people. Caw speaks of an incident when he is brought into disagreement with the local Free Church minister. The local minister dismissed painting as a 'dravelin trade' and 'spoke to his mother of art as vanity and even wickedness, and pointed to its connection with the Church of Rome, which dragged Italy down until it was a land of fiddlers and painters and such irreligious folk'<sup>177</sup>. Caw tells us that McTaggart dismissed the comments as narrow-minded but never quite forgave 'the cloth' for its interference<sup>178</sup>.

McTaggart was christened William, after his maternal grandfather, the skipper and owner of a trading schooner. The sea and land were certainly in 'the blood' of the growing boy which he captured, in reflection, as an old man; 'as a child I had been moved when I saw for the first time, from the rising ground to the south, the loch spread out below me, with Kilbrannan Sound and the Arran hills beyond, and the fishing fleet going out'<sup>179</sup>. Caw compares these reflections favourably with the inspiration of Constable when he writes, 'Truly he could have said with Constable that his own parish, half seaboard and half landward, had made him an artist'<sup>180</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. The Kilbrannan Sound separates the Kintyre Peninsula from the island of Arran and is situated on the western arm of the Firth of Clyde.



As a young boy, so tradition tells us, McTaggart exhibited a natural ability towards art. It was said that, during the artist's lifetime, that the young McTaggart started to show a leaning towards art when he started modelling clay animals on his father's farm as a child. It was, however, during his time with Dr Buchanan that the young McTaggart became resolute in his determination to become an artist. During the quiet times of his employment William would sit and make sketches. It was said that if anyone called during the Doctor's absence his apprentice would not record the fact by writing down the name but by drawing a recognisable portrait<sup>181</sup>. Dr Buchanan soon recognised and encouraged the talent in the young artist; he used his contacts with the local well-to-do families to allow William to see portraits by Graham Gilbert and Daniel Macnee<sup>182</sup>. A letter written by William to his brother Duncan displays the interest Dr Buchanan had for the young McTaggart and the now determined tone to become an artist:

Dr Buchanan says he will try and get a place for me in Glasgow as I am only losing time with him. I have learnt all he can learn me. If I had a situation that I could live by I could make myself a painter, he says it's a painter I will be, and so it is.<sup>183</sup>

### 2.1.2 Life as a Student in Edinburgh

William McTaggart took up his studies at the Trustee's Academy on the 19 April 1852. The Board of Manufactures for Scotland founded the Trustee's Academy in 1760 and its initial role was to improve the designs for the textile industry. Very quickly, however, it became a place

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<sup>181</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 16.

<sup>182</sup> John Graham Gilbert (1794 – 1866) was admitted to the Scottish Academy in 1829 and exhibited fifty-eight pictures (thirty-nine were portraits).

<sup>183</sup> National Library of Scotland (Acc. 11157/2), 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1851.

where artists could be trained<sup>184</sup>. There had been some notable teachers at the Academy including John Graham whose pupils included: Sir David Wilkie, Sir William Allan and Sir John Watson Gordon. In April 1852 Robert Scott Lauder became the Director of the Antique, Life and Colour Class and with John Ballantyne they were to play an important part in the formation of the meaning and style of William McTaggart's art<sup>185</sup>.

The hours of study could be very long. Caw tells us that Ballantyne would teach from 8am until 10am whilst Lauder visited from 6pm to 8pm<sup>186</sup>. The students were then expected to supplement their teaching and draw for up to twelve hours a day. Caw asserts that when McTaggart entered the academy he went straight into Lauder's class and drew from 'the round'<sup>187</sup>. However, these claims need to be looked upon with some suspicion. Errington makes the case that each student had to pass through each stage of education and McTaggart's portfolio certainly represented this progressive achievement<sup>188</sup>. The earliest studies were geometric and ornamental with only a hint of shading and then the student would draw human forms, legs and feet, viewed from different angles that were taken from flat drawings. Thereafter, the student would pass to three-dimensional objects with shading. Upon completing these elementary levels the student would then be ready to draw groups of casts whilst sitting in 'the round'.

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<sup>184</sup> The focus of the school shifted from applied arts to encompass fine art. From 1826 the Royal Scottish Academy, on The Mound, always had a fine artist as the master, the first being the French painter William Delacour.

<sup>185</sup> Robert Scott Lauder (1803 – 1869) was a Scottish mid-Victorian artist who described himself as a 'historical painter'. He was one of the original members of the Royal Scottish Academy. John Ballantyne (1815 – 1897) was a portrait and history painter who studied in Edinburgh, London, Paris and Rome. In 1848 he became the Headmaster of the Trustees' Academy.

<sup>186</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 10.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>188</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 17.

In the early years McTaggart spent many summer months painting portraits to pay for his studies. Initially this work was done in his adopted home of Edinburgh where he would work from 9 New Street in the old town<sup>189</sup>. In 1853 at the invitation of Captain Watt the young William travelled to Dublin and for the next four summers painted for the Irish people. In addition to Ireland McTaggart went on several occasions to Northumberland to execute portraits for Mr. Darling of Fowberry Tower. It might be claimed that the young McTaggart was only painting to make money but this was not the case for he placed his own vocation and training at a higher priority. It was said that in 1853 McTaggart was offered a position as an art master in Liverpool at a princely sum of £300 a year but declined<sup>190</sup>.

Friends played an important part in the development and formation of McTaggart. It seems that Lauder's reputation was able to attract many notable artists to the school. These included William Orchardson, Hugh Cameron, Peter Graham and John MacWhirter. Three members of the Academy developed a close friendship with the young William that was to last throughout the artist's life. George Paul Chalmers, an impulsive character, at the age of twenty, came from Montrose to Edinburgh<sup>191</sup>. Tom Graham, aged fifteen, the orphan son of the Crown Chamberlain of Orkney moved from the isle to the Academy. Finally, John Pettie, a son of a prosperous country shopkeeper was said to have 'high principles of conduct and the fine sense of honour instilled by his upbringing in a

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<sup>189</sup> New Street, just off Carlton Road was only a five-minute walk to the Royal Scottish Academy.

<sup>190</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 13.

<sup>191</sup> George Paul Chalmers (1833 – 1878) painted both portraits and landscapes. The most celebrated paintings include *The End of the Harvest* (1873), *Running Water* (1875) and *The Legend* (1871). His life was cut short in 1878 when he was assaulted and died of his injuries.

religious home'<sup>192</sup>. Pettie, as a Christian man, certainly had a lot in common with McTaggart.

### 2.1.3 William McTaggart: A Man of Faith.

William McTaggart always remained true to his Christian faith throughout his life. In the early days he might have found good reason to permanently turn his back on the, sometimes, austere faith of the west coast of Scotland. We are reminded that McTaggart received, '...little encouragement from his parents or from his friend, whose views were probably typified by the Free Church minister, who contemptuously dismissed painting as a "dravelin trade"'<sup>193</sup>. At the Disruption of 1843 we are told that William's parents became staunch supporters of the Free Church. However, both of McTaggart's marriages, to Mary Bolochan Holmes in 1863 and Marjory Henderson in 1886<sup>194</sup>, took place at the United Presbyterian Church<sup>195</sup>. This might have been to accommodate his future wife's wishes or it might be due to the independent streak that McTaggart displayed throughout his life. The obituaries confirm that he had a 'Christian burial' in the Free Church of Scotland<sup>196</sup> and that McTaggart served as an Elder in the same Church<sup>197</sup>. Although McTaggart was a man who liked to express his opinions freely and sometimes used the Bible to substantiate that point of view, never the less the Scottish artist was predominantly a quiet man with regard to his

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 15. John Pettie (1839–1893) became a member of the Scottish Academy in 1874 with his diploma picture the *Jacobites*, 1745.

<sup>193</sup> "William McTaggart R.S.A Biography and Appreciation", *The Scotsman*, (5<sup>th</sup> December 1917), 5.

<sup>194</sup> See Marriage Register (Pl. 21a) and (Pl. 21b).

<sup>195</sup> The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1847–1900) was formed in 1847 by the union of the United Secession Church and Relief Church, and in 1900 merged with the Free Church of Scotland.

<sup>196</sup> Midlothian Council Archives, "William McTaggart Family Collection (1880-1986)"

GB584/WM/7. Newspaper obituary notices for William McTaggart, 1910.

<sup>197</sup> "Points of View: Letters from Readers", *Three Scottish Worthies*. *The Scotsman*, (17<sup>th</sup> August, 1935). Looking back with appreciation – '...when Mr McTaggart and I were *co-Presbyters* in adjacent parishes, I recall an unforgettable hour I was privileged to spend with him in his studio in the garden at Bonnyrigg.'

personal feelings and kept any personal expression of faith to a minimum<sup>198</sup>. This, of course, makes it difficult to know truly the feelings and inner emotions of McTaggart's heart but through his paintings, the subjects chosen, what others have written about him and his public commitment to the Church, it is possible to articulate, with caution, about his religious outlook<sup>199</sup>.

At the Academy William McTaggart won a number of prizes: in 1855 a second prize for painting in the round and a third prize in the life academy, in 1856 once again a second prize for drawing in the round and a first prize for painting from life, and in 1857 a first prize for painting from the antique. The few pounds that McTaggart received from each award would have been desperately needed to pay for his weekly bills and the painting equipment required. In the latter part of the 1850s William sends a letter home to his parents asking for money towards his rent that was three months in arrears<sup>200</sup>.

In 1854 McTaggart first exhibited at the *Royal Hibernian Academy* where he displayed a portrait group, 'Children of J. Morton, Esq.'<sup>201</sup>. Caw tells us that McTaggart having earned money from portraiture would then seek opportunities to paint picture outdoors<sup>202</sup>. Examples of this work include *The Sleeper and the Watcher (1854)*, a picture of a collie sitting on guard over a girl who, having lost her way through the hills, has sunk down exhausted. On his arrival back to Campbeltown in 1858 McTaggart commenced an elaborate study from nature that Caw describes as a 'pre-

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<sup>198</sup> Kvaerne, *Singing Songs*, 258.

<sup>199</sup> The family of McTaggart continued in their Christian faith: Anne Mary McTaggart married James Caw 'according to the forms of the Free Church of Scotland (Pl. 21c) and Betty, his daughter, helped with the Church of Scotland's Breakfast Mission to provide meals to local children, [www.lothianlives.org.uk](http://www.lothianlives.org.uk).

<sup>200</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 20.

<sup>201</sup> The Royal Hibernian Academy was founded in Dublin in 1823.

<sup>202</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 19.

Raphaelite study of the most extreme type'<sup>203</sup>. It was whilst in Campbeltown on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1859 that William McTaggart received the news that he had been elected an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy. It is now important to reflect on some of McTaggart's prominent works of art to detect how his religious outlook is conveyed in painting. *The Past and the Present*, one of McTaggart's early paintings, intensely deals with the present but very quickly wants to take us somewhere else.

## 2.2 The Past and the Present

*The Past and the Present* [Pl. 10] was painted in the old graveyard of the ruined church of Kilchousland; the setting was above Kilbrannan sound, a mile north of the entrance to Campbeltown Loch<sup>204</sup>. The church dates from the twelfth and sixteenth centuries and the graveyard contains a number of eighteenth century headstones [Pl. 11]. Caw states that the painting represents, 'the larger and more complex than any he had yet attempted'<sup>205</sup>. Initially the painting was named *The Builders* and comprises four boys and a girl engaged in building a tower or a house with bricks left by a mason in a burial place by the sea.

In June 1859 McTaggart made acquaintance with Robert Craig of Glasgow who bought *The Past and the Present*. Like so many of the patrons in the early career of McTaggart Craig tried to press his opinions upon the work of art and influence the creativity of the artist. Robert Craig suggested re-naming the painting when he wrote to McTaggart, 'It

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>204</sup> The remains of the parish church, without the roof, was dedicated to St Constantine but was abandoned in 1617 when the parish was united with Kilkerran and Kilmichael.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 26.

occurs to me that the subject would be far more telling if instead of the house, you introduced a church or part of one, sufficient to convey the idea that it really is a churchyard; the tombstones certainly suggests that, but the ordinary house like appearance of the building removes it again; and a title of 'The Past and the Present' or something like that would complete it.<sup>206</sup> The title seemed to capture McTaggart's imagination; however the simple church in Kilchousland never had a gothic door as seen in the completed painting [Pl. 11].

There were two oil studies for *The Past and the Present* before the final study was completed in 1860. Each of the three studies show both the progression of McTaggart's thinking and the influence of his patron, Robert Craig. The first oil sketch depicts a group of three boys kneeling and constructing a building out of the masonry stones. An older girl and two other children stand looking on, ready to help, and clasping building materials. In the background there is an elderly man, who is sitting in the shadow of the church but his face can clearly be seen as can his white hair. In the second study one of the three children standing is removed which appears to have the effect of creating space between the three kneeling boys around the gravestone and the now two children standing. The eldest of the two children is still looking towards the three boys constructing their building. The elderly man in the background has now retreated into the dark shadow of the church so that his face cannot easily be seen and he is now wearing a hat.

The completed version of *The Past and the Present*, for Robert Craig, has important changes made to the subjects of the painting. The three boys who are now obviously constructing a building are sitting in

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<sup>206</sup> Robert Craig to McTaggart in a letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 1859, in National Library of Scotland (Acc. 11157/5). It seems likely that Robert Craig was originally from Edinburgh but bought his cousin's dwindling stationary business, which was based in Glasgow. [Jones, G., Rose M. B., *Family Capitalism*, Frank Cass and Company Limited, London, 1993].

the light and are disconnected, in their actions, from the two children standing. The older girl who stands next to a younger girl has now lifted her gaze from the three boys and looks out towards the right side of the canvas, whilst the old man is sitting in the dark shadow of the crumbling old church.

Some of the changes that take place between the three compositions are probably due to the patron attempting to impose his personal design, especially the inclusion of the gothic door to make the building more explicitly a church. I would, however, like to strongly dismiss any real suggestion that McTaggart was in the pocket of his patrons. Errington makes the case that 'McTaggart avoided making any real changes in his design which did not conform to his own ideas'<sup>207</sup>. It seems that McTaggart had the ability of placating his patrons whilst at the same time expressing his own thoughts and feelings. These thoughts and feelings in the 1850s were probably influenced by his own upbringing, experience and Robert Scott Lauder but also, at that time, by the Pre-Raphaelite movement and in particular the work of John Everett Millais.

Millais' work in the 1850s was regularly discussed in terms of poetic feeling, designed to be emotional rather than depicted with a specific narrative appeal. Some of the critics argued that this gave Millais' work a distinctive quality lifting it beyond the work of other artists. *The Scotsman* made this point when it remarked upon *Marianna* [Pl. 12] when it was exhibited at the RSA in 1852, 'her worn look and peculiar complexion have a poetical truth and deep feeling about them, worth all the conventional simpering beauty that could so easily have

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<sup>207</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 30.



been bestowed upon her'<sup>208</sup>. In 1857, *The Art Treasures Examiner* reviewing Millais' *Autumn Leaves* [Pl. 14] notes, 'This is a poem put upon canvas by Millais, which everybody with a soul will understand. The picture is not of a moving accident or of a blood-freezing story; it is a picture of thinking hearts...' <sup>209</sup>.

During the 1850s, artists in Scotland could have examined Millais work at first-hand through major loan exhibitions at the RSA; these included: *Marianna* (1852) [Pl. 12], *Ophelia* (1853) [Pl. 13] and *Autumn Leaves* (1858) [Pl. 14]. In 1866 Millais was made an Honorary Member of the Scottish Academy. Ruskin delivered a series of four lectures, on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1853, at the Philosophical Institution in Edinburgh on Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>210</sup> In his lectures Ruskin discussed the *Pre-Raphaelites* in their historical context: 'With all their faults, their pictures are, since Turner's death, the best – incomparably the best – on the walls of the Royal Academy.'<sup>211</sup> It seems with the coming together of exhibitions, reviews and lectures that Pre-Raphaelitism had an important impact upon several Scottish artists in the 1850s and 1860s, for example Hugh Cameron's *Going to the Hay* (1858)<sup>212</sup> [Pl. 15].

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<sup>208</sup> *The Scotsman*, 21 February, 1852. Millais' *Mariana* is based upon Tennyson's poem of the same title. When this was shown at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1851, the catalogue gave the poem's refrain in the version that ends three of its seven stanzas:

*She only said, 'My life is dreary,  
He cometh not,' she said  
She said, I am weary, weary,  
I would that I were dead!*

<sup>209</sup> Ignoramus Piger, *Autumn Leaves*, *The Art Treasures Examiner: A Pictorial, Critical and Historical Record of the Art Treasures Exhibition at Manchester in 1857*, London and Manchester, 1857, p. 142

<sup>210</sup> *The Scotsman*, 19 November 1853.

<sup>211</sup> Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*. Edinburgh, November 1853, Works vol. XII. P. 159-160

<sup>212</sup> Hugh Cameron (1835 – 1918) trained in Edinburgh and London. He specialised in paintings of everyday life, often featuring children in rural or seaside settings.

It is not surprising given the influence of Millais and the Pre-Raphaelite movement upon Scottish art that this influenced the world of McTaggart. McTaggart says that he went through a Pre-Raphaelite phase in the 1850s and 1860s and Millais features in the correspondence between himself and George Simpson in the 1860s<sup>213</sup>. The influence of Millais upon McTaggart can be seen running through – *Going to Sea* (1858) [Pl. 16], *The Past and the Present* (1859) [Pl. 10] and *Spring* (1864) [Pl. 17].

The link between McTaggart's paintings of the time and, for example, Millais *Autumn Leaves* [Pl. 14], is the lack of an overt narrative. McTaggart seems to have learnt that suggestion rather than a direct statement is more powerful. In *The Past and the Present* [Pl. 10] McTaggart creates juxtaposition between childhood and the suggestion of death that compares to the generalised mood of *Autumn Leaves*. The decay implicitly suggested in the setting of the aged church of Kilchousland and the old man looking on in the background resonates strongly with Millais' burning leaves<sup>214</sup>. Like Millais, McTaggart's depiction in *The Past and the Present* is suggestive and poetic.

The Scotsman's review of the 1858 RSA exhibition states that, 'the elevated sentiment and suggestive character of 'Autumn Leaves' by Millais – so pure, so holy in its calm repose are to be felt rather than spoken of.'<sup>215</sup> It is quite possible that McTaggart influenced by both

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<sup>213</sup> National Library of Scotland (MS 6351/3-4), 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1861.

<sup>214</sup> *Autumn Leaves* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856. The painting has been interpreted as the representation of the transience of youth and beauty. The lines of Tennyson's poem *Tears, Idle Tears in the Princes* (1847) may have influenced Millais:

*Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean.  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
And thinking on the days that are no more.*

<sup>215</sup> *The Scotsman*, 3 April 1858

Millais and his patron Craig went through a similar 'religious reflection' whilst he was painting the three depictions of *The Past and the Present*.

The setting is obviously a church and that church is at Kilchousland a few miles north of Campbeltown where McTaggart spent the autumn of 1859<sup>216</sup>. The old decaying church and the elderly gentleman, who sits in its shadow, represent something of the past. This feeling of mortality and the passing of time is heightened with the headstone in the foreground. On the third depiction of the painting the door to the church is bricked-up and there is something final in its decay. Ivy hangs all around the church and its days of life have long passed. McTaggart in the work of art is making explicit that he will not appeal idealism. The elderly gentleman moves further into the darkened shadows and acquires a hat and walking stick to give emphasis. Quite possibly McTaggart had his old minister in mind when painting this figure, the clergyman who warned that painting was the 'work of the devil'.

If the church and the other worldliness to which it pointed was something of the past, then what did McTaggart want to suggest regarding the present? The three young boys who retain their number through the three oil paintings are building. In the first painting the construction seems to be a little more obscured and it is possible that they are erecting a tower. However, it becomes quite obvious that the construction in the third painting is a building using red bricks. This new building is in the light, as opposed to the church, which is in the shadows; the building is not complete but it has all the new possibilities. The foliage that surrounds the boys is both very natural and real. McTaggart at this point is enjoying the immanence of the moment by observing in

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<sup>216</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 28.

great detail the contemporary and the observable – the children playing amongst the foliage in the graveyard. The spiritual experience that is to be found is not to be found in the decaying words of the church but rather in the presence of youth and in the beauty created by nature.

The final major change in the three studies is the older girl standing up. In the first painting she is connected to the three builders by the presence of two children around her, her gaze towards their play and the bricks she is holding in her hands. In the second canvas she becomes disconnected by the removal of one of the two standing children but her gaze is still towards their recreation. However, in the third picture the older girl's gaze has been lifted from the builders and moves towards the right-hand side of the work of art. The girl stands slightly in the shadow of the church but looks out towards the light. The suggestion here is that the girl is very much in the present but looks with anticipation with regards the future, a new future where a new religious outlook will be built. In so much as McTaggart through the gaze of the girl looks for the continued, but not yet perceivable, work of the divine.

In the next work of art, *Spring*, McTaggart deals in detail with nature and the landscape. However, the landscape itself, with the figures of the children, is beyond that which the Scottish artist normally experienced, a kind of an idealised escapism.

## 2.3 Spring

In correspondence with Chalmers the expression of change within the imagination of McTaggart is highlighted – Chalmers writes, 'Your letter was brimful of splendid feeling. Now I begin to know you. The past has been a false representation of yourself. Now your own true, genuine

feeling is welling out at every crevice of your nature. Let it out Mac, you have enough and to spare. It will do you good and every other body that gets a share of it. A fine thing is sympathy'<sup>217</sup>. We detect a heightened move in feeling and sympathy when the viewer's eye is drawn from *The Past and the Present* [Pl. 10] to *Spring* [Pl. 17].

McTaggart started the preliminary work on *Spring* during the winter months of 1863; it was almost entirely a studio composition that was planned and painted in McNab Street, Edinburgh where the painter lived. The completed work of *Spring* is a small picture comprising of two little girls placed in a rural landscape, containing a few sheep and lambs and over the near hill a row of farmer's cottages. The impression of spring resonates out from the canvas: the delicate blue-white sky, the lustrous green grass and the radiant white daisies and yellow buttercups. This arousing of life in nature is delightfully encapsulated in the two children who are toying with the flowers, unconsciously enraptured by the possibilities of the season and the beauty of the day. At a time when former students of Lauder, who were living in London, were able to charge two or three hundred pounds a commission the patron of *Spring*, G. B. Simpson, seems to have acquired a good deal when he paid thirty-five pounds<sup>218</sup>.

McTaggart was labouring on two pieces of work for Simpson during 1863: *Spring* [Pl. 17] and its now missing companion *Autumn* [Pl. 18]. In *Autumn* McTaggart seems to continue the themes of *The Past and the Present* that of fulfilment and the passing of time. The painting has a figure in the autumn of life and some children returning from gathering

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<sup>217</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 38.

<sup>218</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 36. Sir William Orchardson (1832 – 1910), a good friend of McTaggart, moved to London in 1862 and established himself in the very smart location of Fitzroy Square.

brambles. In *Spring*, however, something different seems to be happening. The relative size of the two figures allows for the natural scene to explode into life and brings hope in the enjoyment of the moment. In developing the composition McTaggart maintains the relative size of the two girls in both the pencil study and the completed painting; he seems unconcerned about the detail of the natural background, and he is willing to develop in conversation with his patron, but the size of the natural scene is consistent.

What we observe, therefore, in *Spring* is that McTaggart is conscious of the symbolic undertones of his subjects, that landscape and nature are beginning to influence the artist and McTaggart is expressing something more of himself in his studies.

When comparing the approach of Millais and McTaggart to their *Spring* subjects similarities and overlap can be observed. Both painters provide the link between young girls and the signifiers of spring: flowers and lambs. The girl lying on the grass and playing with the flowers in McTaggart's *Spring* relate to the girl stretching out with a grass stem in her mouth in Millais' picture. A noteworthy difference between the two paintings, however, is that Millais' figure looks out towards the observer whilst the two girls in McTaggart's *Spring* seem to be absorbed in their own thoughts. This difference between Millais' painting and that of McTaggart's composition seems to highlight an important departure in the Scottish artist's approach.

When the two compositions of *Spring* are compared and contrasted it appears that Millais' depiction is more artificial and McTaggart's more natural. In sympathy with Pre-Raphaelite paintings Millais' representation

captures *Spring* [Pl. 19] in terms of a pretty young girl caught in a succession of static poses, within a formalised orchard setting. On the other hand McTaggart's portrayal of *Spring* [Pl. 17] encapsulates genuine country girls in poor clothing and without shoes. The two girls are more naturally posed and their appearance suggests that they are part of the landscape in which they are set.

This dissimilarity in appearance is strengthened by each artist's technique and composition. Instrumental in this is McTaggart's use of broken brushwork that contrasts with Millais' careful delineation of form. Although Millais was attempting to achieve a broader effect he was partly constrained by Pre-Raphaelite technical practice. Each figure appears to be observed in remoteness, with analogous illumination and is artificial to its setting. It may have been that McTaggart was influenced but not constrained by Millais' depiction of *Spring* [Pl. 19] given that it was exhibited at the RA in 1859. McTaggart would have also seen James Archer's *Summertime, Gloucestershire* [Pl. 20] displayed at the Scottish Academy in 1859. Archer's picture resembles Millais' *Spring* in several ways but provides a greater emphasis on landscape<sup>219</sup>.

The representation of country life by William McTaggart was in step with wider society and that tended towards rural idealism. With the increase in urban living many in the Victorian church promoted the ideals of rural life. Despite serving in a central Glasgow parish, Thomas Chalmers vision for the Church of Scotland was based upon the rural parochial concept. When in 1890 William Booth turned his attention from pure evangelism to social action the founder of the Salvation Army – the

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<sup>219</sup> James Archer (1823 – 1904) was born in Edinburgh. Archer was first exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1842 with the biblical *The Child St John in the Wilderness*.

very epitome of urban evangelism – produced a scheme of ‘social salvation’ based upon rural idealism when he suggested the urban poor should be moved to a ‘farm colony’<sup>220</sup>.

Rural idealism tried to link humans with nature in a pantheistic sense and was captured by the romantic poets such as William Wordsworth:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity....because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a greater state of simplicity...because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the permanent forms of nature.<sup>221</sup>

This poetic rusticism emphasised both the moral and physical advantages of the countryside in response to the encroaching industrialisation and urban development. In Scotland there was indeed some justification for this widespread assessment of the countryside. The standard of life for the rural poor was accepted as superior in comparison to city slums. A study of the eating habits of Scottish agricultural labourers in 1868 revealed them to be ‘well fed’. Large and healthy children were registered; a state of health which contrasted with the poorly-fed, rickett-suffering children of the city poor.<sup>222</sup> For many, including McTaggart, the city was somewhere to escape from and the countryside a place to escape to. In 1889 McTaggart moved from the city to Broomieknowe to enthusiastically participate in the rural ideal. For the Scottish artist Broomieknowe represented an early retirement at the age of fifty-four

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<sup>220</sup> Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain: Controversies*, (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1988,) 70

<sup>221</sup> William Wordsworth, preface to *Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and Other Poems* (1802), John Haydon (ed.), *William Wordsworth: The Poems*, New Haven and London, 1981, vol. I, p.869-70.

<sup>222</sup> R. Hutchinson, “Report on the Dietaries of Scottish Agricultural Labourers”, *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, vol. II, (1868).



from city life to a rural sanctuary. As Caw asserts, 'McTaggart's view from the garden of his house might be right in the country save for a glimpse of the Bonnyrigg houses and steeple through the trees of the adjoining garden.'<sup>223</sup>

As well as the emphasis on the physical beauty of the countryside writers and commentators underscored both the moral and spiritual benefits of rural life. In 1865 the first series of *Country Life* magazine appeared. The 1868 edition carried an article which pointed to the intrinsic worth of the countryside; it stated, '...our sympathies are not with the town but rather those who seek the most secret and exquisite haunts of Nature...'. In the magazine the emphasis was not just on the 'mere scenic effect', but a deeper meaning embedded in a pantheistic expression. The writer approves of those who 'believe that in every age and clime...God has left some sermon in the stone – some book in the running brook, full of meaning to those who will listen to their voices.'<sup>224</sup> So it is not unreasonable to conclude that in the McTaggart's depiction of *Spring* [Pl. 17] an idealised image of the countryside is 'brushed' onto the canvas to display an image of how the artist viewed how God meant things to be.

McTaggart's understanding of the countryside is captured well when the artist chooses to move from Edinburgh to his rural retreat at Broomieknowe in 1889, but this is already reflected in the painter's early works such as *Spring*. It is significant in the development of McTaggart's work that he chose to move eight miles from Edinburgh on the direct

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<sup>223</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 119.

<sup>224</sup> *Country Life Magazine*, 8 August 1868.

suburban rail line rather than to his native Kintyre, an area more remote and of potentially harsher appearance. At Broomieknowe McTaggart had the opportunity to portray a more cultivated landscape as shown in the farming landscape of *Spring*.

It is also worth noting that whilst painting at Broomieknowe McTaggart was selective with the local landscape that he chose to paint. For instance the artist did not depict the industrial aspects of the area, such as the nearby quarry or carpet factory. McTaggart made no attempt to incorporate a 'modern-life' motif into his work. Rather McTaggart tended to paint landscape subjects that were limited to his own garden such *Blithe October* (1895) and *Consider the Lilies* [Pl. 69]. In this respect *Spring* [Pl. 17] seems already to align itself with the conscious effort to depict a specific view of nature free from the impact of modern technology upon the landscape, which extended to the exclusion of agricultural machinery.

This same selective view of nature in McTaggart's landscapes can also be detected in his use of children. McTaggart often used his own children as models in his paintings. The photographs that survive of his own family indicate that their normal attire consisted of smart dresses, pinafores and smocks, stockings and shoes or boots [Pl. 21]. However, in McTaggart's paintings they are often portrayed wearing simple rough clothing and are often bare footed. This depiction of the simple rural poor is seen in line with other artists of the eighteenth century including Thomas Gainsborough, George Morland and William Collins<sup>225</sup>. Often the works of these artists depict the acceptable face of rural poverty; the children are simple but well fed, they are found in a rich and secure landscape and they seem to signify harmony between humans and nature.

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<sup>225</sup> Thomas Gainsborough (1727 - 1788) painted *Cottage Girl with Dog and Pitcher* (1785) is a notable example of rural poverty, which many would replicate.

In *Spring* [Pl. 17] McTaggart allows his portrayal of childhood to provide an emotional link with the landscape, which is a harmony between humanity and nature. This sympathy between humans and nature can be seen throughout many of McTaggart's paintings including *The Harvest Moon* of 1899 [Pl. 23]. The title carries a poetic intimation, enhanced by the young couple hand-in-hand, the sprawling children and the rich, shimmering gold and green colouring of the picture.

McTaggart's promotion of this kind of 'humanity' rather than sublime landscape painting does carry with it a kind of Highland / Lowland dissimilarity and a consequent accent upon the literary tradition of Burns rather than Scott; whilst Scott's representation of Scotland commonly emphasised the richly romantic or the wild and inhospitable, Burns' presented a land cultivated and inhabited by man.

It can be assumed that McTaggart was familiar with the works of Scotland's famous poet as he was asked to provide three illustrations for a volume of Burns' poems published by Messers. Nimmo in 1868<sup>226</sup>.

Several of McTaggart's paintings have reference to Burns including *The Soldier's Return* [Pl. 60], *Whar the Burnie rins into the Sea* (1883) and *When the Kye come Hame* (1901). Peter McOmish Dott, McTaggart's friend and dealer, concurs with this link between Burns and McTaggart when he writes in 1901:

McTaggart's art will be found to have certain elements in common with the songs of Burns. Each artist lacks that idealism which carries us away from simple Nature into the regions of lofty imagination ....commonplace. Nature

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<sup>226</sup> The three poems, for which McTaggart's illustrations were reproduced as wood engravings, were *Auld Lang Syne*, *I'll aye ca' in by yon Town* and *Mary Morrison*.

becomes re-interpreted, vivified, and glorified for all of us. Throughout McTaggart's pictures runs a vein of kindly, democratic sentiment. Therefore in landscape, he prefers homely and 'human' scenery, leaving untouched the solitudes of Nature, however sublime.<sup>227</sup>

Whilst McTaggart's work does not endeavour to take in the coverage or examination of human life that is found in Burns' poetry it does share the aspiration to find significance in the everyday and the heart of people and nature, as Burns wrote:

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,  
That's a' the learning I desire;  
Then, tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire at Pleugh or cart,,  
My Muse, tho' hamely in attire, May tough the heart.  
(From Epistle to J. Lapraik)<sup>228</sup>

Therefore, when we consider *Spring* we recognise a work of art that refrains from trying to capture the sublime and instead seeks to represent the natural and ordinary, something that McTaggart would experience in the everyday occurrences of life. However, the landscape is restrained from capturing the grim realities of life, the urban and industrial, and in this instance McTaggart seeks a more perfect world than he would surely have experienced whilst living in urban Edinburgh. Therefore at one level McTaggart works in the theological framework of immanence in that there is an intimate relationship between the artist and the divine as he tries to capture that which is observable in nature. On the

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<sup>227</sup> P.M. Dott, *Notes Technical and Explanatory on the Art of Mr William McTaggart*, Edinburgh, 1901, 18-19.

<sup>228</sup> Lapraik was one of a number of local poets who influenced Burns during his early years. The story goes that after hearing one of Lapraik's songs entitled 'When I upon they bosom lean' he was prompted to write an Epistle to J Lapraik.

other hand there are elements of transcendence in *Spring* where the natural surroundings and human figures become idealised and are beyond that which would have naturally been experienced.

As we now approach McTaggart's most celebrated piece of work, *The Storm*, we might be tempted to believe that the artist himself witnessed the events that are depicted on that most dramatic of nights. There is no doubt that the deep sympathy that McTaggart captures of the unfolding disaster was from a first hand experience but the image that is captured on canvas is surely too spectacular to be a real event.

## 2.4 The Storm

*The Storm* [Pl. 24] is regarded as one of McTaggart's great paintings and represents a moment when the Scottish artist has made the transition from being a 'figure painter' to a 'landscape artist'. In developing the landscape that will become *The Storm* it is noticeable that the human figures play such a small role, that they are nearly lost in the welter of swirling brushstrokes as the sea swells amongst the rocks and merges with the sky. McTaggart is now using energy and force to create a feeling of atmosphere and danger as the grey, dank sky hangs over the impending doom. *The Storm* of 1890 had its origins in sketches and painting at Carradale in 1883<sup>229</sup>.

The earlier 1883 version of *The Storm* [Pl. 25] is not much smaller than the 1890 version. It seems to me that the earlier version of *The Storm* was not wholly painted on the spot due to the fact that changes were made to the composition over a period of time; it seems highly unlikely that McTaggart could have come across such a fierce storm more than

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<sup>229</sup> Carradale is 30 miles north of Campbeltown on the Kintyre peninsula.

once in his artistic career. Errington seems to agree with this position when she argues that many changes of mind are evident and this is illustrated by the fact that there is much evidence of scraping on and off by the artist. Errington also says that the bottom six inches of the design and the six inches to the right of the canvas appear to be an afterthought<sup>230</sup>. On closer comparison between the 1883 and 1890 paintings, the figures of the earlier study seem to have a more individual character, the storyline more observable and altogether the whole composition seems to be more compact.

When we consider the 1890 account of *The Storm* [Pl. 24] we are struck by a grander and more homogeneous painting. The sky, sea and rocks appear to glide into each other creating a force that expresses danger<sup>231</sup>. The brushstrokes are highly expressive producing a turbulent mesh of lashing water and heavy wind. The narrative is less explicit and seems to be hidden by the expression of force, but it is still there! On the bank at the left side of the canvas are men holding a telescope peering, with children, at the events being played out below. However, even these observers are affected by the waves that hurtle over the wall. Facing the sea, emerging from the rocks, is a semi-circle of cottages with skiffs moored outside and stakes with drying nets being blown with the energy of the wind. Near the cottages are a collection of men and women being forced off their feet by the wind whilst pushing a rowing boat out into the breakers. In the middle distance we witness a fishing boat fighting against the elements but sailing close to the rocks where fatal danger lies. The main colours, employed by McTaggart, are purple, slate and dark green,

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<sup>230</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 79.

<sup>231</sup> Cloudscape is, in art, the depiction of clouds in the sky. Usually the clouds are shown as viewed from the earth, often including just enough landscape to suggest scale, orientation, weather conditions and distance an example of this would be *Weymouth Bay* [Pl. 26] by John Constable. A highly complex cloudscape is evidence in works of J. M. W. Turner, whom we are told McTaggart admired; this would include *Sunrise with Sea Monsters* (1845) [Pl. 27].

which capture the sheer peril of the impending doom. White is used lavishly everywhere to form the crest of the waves and to highlight the wet ground and figures. McTaggart's motivation for *The Storm* [Pl. 24] seems to evolve from contemporary thinking with regard to the human position in comparison to nature; as Errington claims, 'the subject of the picture is not a stormy sea, nor wild conditions of light and weather for their own sakes, but these as an expression of the massive and violent power against which human beings are raising such frail though heroic resistance'<sup>232</sup>.

McTaggart began to contemplate sea and fishing life as a focus of consideration in the 1870s, a specific genre where there was a lot of evidence of interest. The convention of painting ships at sea was partly derived from 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch marine art. Artists, such as Clarkson Stanfield, would have had a strong influence upon Victorian painters as they viewed one of his 135 compositions at the Royal Academy between 1820 and 1867<sup>233</sup>. Other marine artists of the time would include Edward William Cooke and John Schetky who were resolutely within the Dutch tradition<sup>234</sup>. In Scotland there were a number of artists painting seascapes in the 1860s and 1870s. These embrace: E.T. Crawford (1806-1885), James Cassie (1817-1879), and Sam Bough. W.F. Vallance (1827-1904), Colin Hunter (1841-1904) and Robert Anderson (1842-1885). Both Bough and Vallance studied with McTaggart at the Trustees Academy. Bough's watercolour technique and drawings of east coast fishing villages

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<sup>232</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 80.

<sup>233</sup> Clarkson Frederick Stanfield (1793 - 1867) was born in Sunderland and was a prominent English marine painter [Pl. 28].

<sup>234</sup> Edward William Cooke (1811 - 1880) was born in Pentonville, London and was the son of a well-known engraver George Cooke [Pl. 29]. Cooke painted both land and marinescapes. John Christian Schetky (1778- 1874) was a Scottish marine painter who was born in Edinburgh [Pl. 30].

perhaps had some impact upon McTaggart<sup>235</sup>. William McTaggart certainly held the work of Vallance in high regard as correspondence with George Simpson shows<sup>236</sup>. Amongst all the Scottish artists possibly the work of Colin Hunter bears the closest resemblance to McTaggart's work<sup>237</sup>. The work of Hunter seems to encapsulate some of the sentiment and vivacity that is also found in McTaggart; an instance of this would be to put side-by-side Hunter's *Salmon Fishers* (1885) [Pl. 33] with *Fisher's Landing* (1877) [Pl. 34]. Points of connection can be made between McTaggart and the various seascape artists.

McTaggart's inspiration from the sea can be discovered in his early paintings. The sea can be regarded as 'back-ground' in early paintings such as *The Past and the Present* (1859) [Pl. 10]. The first depiction of the sea can be observed in *The Wreck of the Hesperus* (1861); the characters still take centre stage; however the sea and sky set the atmosphere of the painting<sup>238</sup>. The subject of fishing began to foster in McTaggart's mind in the 1860s and especially after the Scottish artist took a summer retreat to Tarbert in 1868; paintings such as *Fishing Boats and Net Poles, Tarbert* (1869) would be examples of this phase<sup>239</sup>. The 'poetic' landscape and the work of Millais interwove into the movement of deliberation in McTaggart's composition of the 1860s. Therefore, we

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<sup>235</sup> Sam Bough (1822 – 1878) was an English-born landscape painter who spent much of his career working in Scotland. Examples of his work would include *St Andrews* and the *Dreadnought from Greenwich Stairs: Sun Sinking into vapour* (1861) [Pl. 31].

<sup>236</sup> P. 130. Vallance (1827 – 1904) was born in Paisley and did not take up art professionally until 1857. He never quite achieved the freedom of expression that McTaggart enjoyed and concentrated on pictures of shipping.

<sup>237</sup> Colin Hunter (1841 – 1904) was a coastal landscape and marine painter. He was born in Glasgow and exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1868. Examples of his work include *The Herring Market at Sea* (1884) and *Their Only Harvest*.

<sup>238</sup> *The Wreck of the Hesperus* was based upon a narrative poem by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, first published in *Ballads and Other Poems* in 1842.

<sup>239</sup> Tarbert is a village in Scotland in the Argyll and Bute council area. It is built around East Loch Tarbert, an inlet of Loch Fyne, and extends over the isthmus which links the peninsula of Kintyre to Knapdale and West Loch Tarbert.



scrutinise the toil of fisherman, through the eyes of children, in *The Old Net* (1868) [Pl. 35] which associates with the notion of youth and the passing of age as found in *The Past and the Present* [Pl. 10], *Spring* [Pl. 17] and Millais' *Autumn Leaves* [Pl. 14].

An important figure and influence upon the work of McTaggart is James Clarke Hook<sup>240</sup>. In his review of the paintings exhibited at the 1888 Glasgow International Exhibition, Walter Armstrong puts Hook at the forefront of a new movement in British landscape painting where he states, 'Hook is the *facile Princeps* in the school which counts Mr. Colin Hunter, Mr. Hamilton McCallum, Mr. McTaggart..'. In a number of ways McTaggart and Hook had a similar approach to art. Hook, like McTaggart, had a preference to paint outdoors and spent holidays painting at family retreats. Both artists dressed up their own children to imitate the rural poor. According to A. H. Palmer Hook referred to the rural lower classes as possessing 'the soiled beauty of nature'<sup>241</sup>. In the same way that McTaggart moved from Edinburgh to Broomieknowe, Hook moved from London to his country sanctuary at Hambeldon in Surrey. There are strong parallels, therefore, with McTaggart's poetic ruralism; the desire to escape the environment of the city to focus upon 'rustic' subjects which were seen to have a more intimate connection with nature. The balance of emphasis that McTaggart and Hook place upon the figures and nature in their paintings during the 1870s is comparable; for both artists there was a move from figures with landscape to landscape with figures. Therefore McTaggart's *Bait Gatherers* (1879) [Pl. 37] is

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<sup>240</sup> James Clarke Hook RA (1819 – 1907) was an English painter of marine, landscapes and historical scenes. An example of his work would be *The Fisherman's Goodnight* (1856). Hook's work took him to picturesque coastal villages where he painted 'en plein air' in Scotland, Devon and Cornwall.

<sup>241</sup> A. H. Palmer was the son of Samuel Palmer the poetical landscape painter. A. H. Palmer makes several references to Hook and McTaggart in the biography of his father *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer* (1892).

comparable to Hook's *Mushroom Gatherers* (1878) [Pl. 36]. In this type of work McTaggart, like Hook, places his subjects in the foreground. They form a significant element of the composition but do not overwhelm the depiction of the land and sea beyond. Therefore, as McTaggart moves towards Carradale in 1883 he is found placing a greater emphasis upon the natural world and allowing the figures only to speak of an implicit narrative.

As McTaggart begins to sketch his first compositions of *The Storm* [Pl. 24] at Carradale in 1883 perhaps a direct influence for his subject matter was, as Errington suggests, the International Fisheries Exhibition in London in the same year<sup>242</sup>. The whole exhibition would have been a source of visual and verbal stimulation with regards the dangers inherent in the fishing industry. McTaggart would have attended the exhibition to receive a gold medal for one of three works he exhibited [Pl. 38]. The subject of Scottish fishing life, therefore, would have been prominent in McTaggart's mind and imagination in this period. The subject of bad weather had become established in the thoughts of McTaggart from the early 1870s and had found its way into the scenes of fishing life, found in oils such as *Through the Wind and Rain* (1875) [Pl. 40].

With regard to subject matter *The Storm* [Pl. 24] is not an unusual painting. However, it does mark an epoch regarding how the subject is treated. *The Storm* is different from many of McTaggart's earlier works, such as *Man and Boy and Boat* (1876) [Pl. 41] depicting the sea and fishing life in the relative scale of figures to landscape. This is the first major piece of work in which the figures are subsumed within the

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<sup>242</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 138.

landscape; it is the first grand composition taking a broad view of the land and sea.

Although *The Storm* does depict human drama, the viewer feels less involved and is effectively distanced from the subject matter; looking down from a height at the scene below. As the viewer surveys the painting the effects of nature and the human drama are more generalised; the work appears to be a summation of personal experience.

If McTaggart is now expressing, in *The Storm*, his personal experiences of life then this shift from narrative subject to a focus on the natural phenomena is worth a closer look. There had been before the 1870s a few examples of artists painting pure seascapes; Turner would be an example<sup>243</sup>. However, it is only as we travel through the last quarter of the nineteenth century that pure seascape becomes more popular. One of the most important British seascape artists of this period was John Brett. An example of his work is the large canvas: *The British Channel seen from the Dorsetshire Cliffs* (1871)<sup>244</sup> [pl. 42]. Other examples of artists painting seascapes during this time include Henry Moore whose work comprised of *A Breeze in the Channel* (1891) [Pl. 43] and Whistler's Seascape *Sea and Rain* (1865)<sup>245</sup> [Pl. 44]. McTaggart's first major seascape without figure incident was accomplished in the late 1870s. *Machrihanish Bay* [Pl. 45] is signed and dated 1878. It is a scene gazing across the cove towards the peninsula at the northern extremity. In the painting McTaggart used soft strokes of colour mingled with areas of white highlighting the waves breaking on the shore. The effect is much calmer and tamer than McTaggart's later work, *The Storm*. Upon

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<sup>243</sup> Margate from the Sea (1835 – 1840) would be an example Turner's seascapes.

<sup>244</sup> John Brett (1831 – 1902) was an artist associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement and was notable for his highly detailed landscape.

<sup>245</sup> Henry Moore (1831 – 1895) was an English marine and landscape painter. James Abbott McNeil Whistler (1834 – 1903) was an American born, British based artist.

completing *The Storm* McTaggart continued to paint seascapes without figures. These include: *A Westerly Gale* (1897), *And All the Choral Waters Sang* (1902) [Pl. 46] and *The Paps of Jura* (1902) [Pl. 47]. However, these depictions never quite captured the force and emotion of *The Storm* [Pl. 24].

One of the later pieces of work *And All the Choral Waters Sang* (1902) seems to portray some of the sentiments of McTaggart. According to Caw *And All the Choral Waters Sang* (1902) was painted outdoors at Machrihanish where McTaggart worked during the month of June. The designation of the painting is a distortion of the line, 'And all the choral water sang' from the fourth verse of Swinburne's poem *At a Month's End* in the second series of *Poems and Ballads* (1878)<sup>246</sup>. There is no deliberate allusion by McTaggart to the substance of the poem, which involves the last encounter of two lovers, but there are comparisons in mood between McTaggart's and Swinburne's imagery of the sea. Both McTaggart's seascapes and Swinburne's poems achieve the combination of direct observation and an emotional response. Swinburne's evocative passages recurrently relate to the impression of light on water. For example, in *The Sunbows*, from a collection of poems *A Midsummer Holiday*, he describes:

Dawn is wild upon the waters where we drink of dawn today:  
Wide, from wave to wave rekindling in rebound through radiant air,

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<sup>246</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837 - 1909) was a poet, playwright, novelist and critic. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in every year from 1903 to 1907 and again in 1909. He wrote the poem, *At a Month's End*, in which the following lines are found:

*With chafe and change of surges chiming,  
The clashing channels rocked and rang  
Large music, wave to wild wave timing,  
And all the choral water sang.*

Flash the fires unwoven and woven again of wind that works in play,...Light  
that leaps and runs and revels through the springing flames of spray.<sup>247</sup>

Such descriptions could form the foundation for McTaggart's studies of light on the sea as found in *And all the Choral Waters Sang*.

Swinburne, working within a pure immanent framework, depicts sunlight as 'The Saviour and Leader and Singer, the living and visible God, whose Shrine is the sea'<sup>248</sup>. In the same way, Caw cites McTaggart as describing the sun as the 'oldest and perhaps the most easily understood of religions.'<sup>249</sup> In both Swinburne, who was a confessed atheist, and McTaggart, who was a Christian, we see a comparable pantheistic attitude to the natural world. And yet the sheer scale of *The Storm* makes it unlikely that this natural disaster ever existed but rather its size expresses a world in the Scottish artist's imagination and something of the otherness for which his soul still searched. I would like to suggest that in painting *The Storm* McTaggart moves beyond any conception of immanence and moves towards transcendence. In that the depiction of *The Storm* has been removed from that which is found in the everyday and permeates the mundane into a sense of the 'other' in the imagination of the artist, an imagination where the crumbling certainties of faith are mixed with the chaotic imagery nature. Therefore, the nature in *The Storm* draws us beyond itself to recognition of something (God) that will always remain beyond full human comprehension or manipulation.

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<sup>247</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 146.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

With the great turmoil that McTaggart often experienced at different stages of his life we see a man in search for a world that would provide permanence, tradition and prosperity. In the following two simple family portraits, *Moss Roses* and *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn*, we get a glimpse of this possibility of stability in a world that is going through dramatic change.

## 2.5 Moss Roses and Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn

Having come through what might be described as the ‘inner-turmoil’ of *The Storm* [Pl. 24] where McTaggart seeks the divine in nature but in the end creates a canvas which was more substantial than the ordinary, he wanted to express the new found stability of his life, with his family, at Dean Park House, Broomieknowe, still building upon the theme of nature.

The fruits of many years of painting commissioned portraits came when McTaggart completed two works of art, *Moss Roses* [Pl. 48] and *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn* [Pl. 49]. *Moss Roses* [Pl. 48] was concluded and signed in 1890. The painting portrays the artist’s second wife and eldest daughter Mysie. Caw states that McTaggart regarded this portrait as his ‘Madonna’ and it was a piece that he had a strong affection for<sup>250</sup>. *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn* was finished in 1892 and is a self-portrait. Both of these paintings convey deep and personal feelings of the Artist, they were never for sale and remained in the family home. At moments of light heartedness McTaggart joked, ‘When my wife and I quarrel I am to sell Moss Roses’, but he never did<sup>251</sup>.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>251</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 99.

The portraits were finished soon after *The Storm* but they are very dissimilar in the image and emotion that they communicate. *The Storm* is full of immediacy and passion whilst the two portraits articulate permanence and tradition. McTaggart does not write intimately about his religious feelings but one can assume that this was a time of reflection in the artist's life and possibly more time was spent reading the 'book he loved best' – the Bible. However, both *The Storm* and the portraits build upon the themes of the natural world. There are a number of ways that the portraits could be interpreted. It is interesting that both of these very personal and intimate portraits should be given unusual titles, named after plants rather than people. The designation of the paintings could just be decorative or it could relate to the unusual colouring – the bronze and gold of the self-portrait, the pinks and rose-shades of his wife and child. On the other hand there is another way of relating the titles with the portraits.

When looking at the painting *Moss Roses* [Pl. 48] it comes to mind that the title relates directly to the portrait. The *Moss Rose* is a delicate flower and the shades of pinks have been embellished upon his wife and child. The brush strokes that swirl around the embrace of the mother and the child's pinafore are circular in shape and seem to capture the many layers of petals of the rose, whilst the strong frame of the mother's body holds the delicate flower in place. The woman / rose metaphor provides a picture of grace and sentiment. However, the fragile structure and delicately coloured white, pale and deep pink petals of the moss rose heighten this. The moss rose has a sweet scent and traditional charm and is found in the cottage garden. The moss rose was regarded as a bit 'old-fashioned' when compared to the new hybrid varieties and may speak of

the artist's traditional view of the role of the wife and mother that was to be lived out in his new life in Broomieknowe.

Caw tells us that both the portraits were conceived and sketched during the last snowfall of winter<sup>252</sup> but this is where their similarity ends. If *Moss Roses* could be regarded as 'delicate' then the *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn* [Pl. 49] could be regarded as 'full-bodied'. The self-portrait is more upright in form and it appears that the stout McTaggart is looking down at the viewer with the force of age and experience. McTaggart is wearing a wide brimmed hat and a palette sits on the painter's left arm; both give the appearance of an 'Old-Master' from years now past. The theme of oak, depicted in the painting with colours of bronze and gold, portrays an image of what many regard as a 'masculine' tree. This very British tree is often associated with themes of durability, upright in growth and resistant to the storms of life. The artist is now 58 years of age and could be regarded as in the 'autumn' of life. However, this does not mean that his creative energies have come to an end but rather they will be directed in a new way that comes with the experience of age. McTaggart himself did not deem his age as a barrier to producing what might become the most reflective phase of his artistic career; this sentiment is conveyed in an interview given to the periodical *Black and White* when he states, 'Not that I am really old. An artist does not begin to enter his prime until he is fifty. Think of Titian, who at the age of eighty was only stopped from painting masterpieces because he died of the plague'<sup>253</sup>.

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<sup>252</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 125.

<sup>253</sup> J.M. Gibbon, 'Painters of the Light, An Interview with William McTaggart' RSA in *Black & White*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1905. The *Black and White* was a British illustrated weekly periodical founded in 1891 by Charles Norris Williamson. The British Library has the complete run of *Black and White*.



Portraiture provided both an income and interest to McTaggart throughout his artistic life. Although McTaggart's contribution as a portrait artist is often neglected, it ought to be regarded as a significant area of his output and should form part of an overall estimate when taking into account the 'human' content of his landscapes. During the early years as an artist McTaggart's main output was portraiture and genre painting. This was mainly out of economic necessity in order to pay for living expenses and painting materials. A number of McTaggart's early portraits were commissioned in Ireland. This included a portrait of Captain Watt who was the skipper of a Glasgow to Dublin steamer which McTaggart used the services of between 1853 and 1856<sup>254</sup>.

In 1854 McTaggart contributed two portraits, *Portrait of the Children of J. Morton Esq* and *Our Jim*, to the Royal Hibernian Academy in Ireland. This was McTaggart's first contribution to a major annual art exhibition and pre-dates his first works at the RSA in 1855. Caw seems to make the case that Ireland was a great source for commissioned portraits for the young Scottish artist<sup>255</sup> but this seems to run contrary to the facts. McTaggart did not exhibit at the Royal Hibernian Academy again until 1863 with a single genre painting *The Sprained Ankle* and no positively identified examples of McTaggart's Irish commissions have been traced<sup>256</sup>.

The portraits drawn by McTaggart in this early period were a continuation of the work done whilst he was a student at the Trustees Academy. They were completed on buff coloured paper and the medium used was pencil or black chalk, often heightened with white and coloured

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<sup>254</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 127.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>256</sup> The early portraits by William McTaggart are very difficult to locate and copy. Enclosed within this thesis is the portrait of William Campbell Esq. as an example [Pl. 50].

chalk. However, McTaggart seemed to use a freer technique than at the academy and was very aware that the medium could be used as a vehicle for expression. The *Portrait of an Unknown Man* (1858) [Pl. 52] is a delicate piece of work that possibly matches the fine and nervous features of the young man. On the other hand the *Portrait of Walter Smith* (1856) [pl. 53] is drawn with strong and dark lines that match the sitter's strong features.

Although McTaggart is renowned as a seascape / landscape painter portraiture played a significant part of the Scottish artist's work throughout his career. Caw indicates that McTaggart was regularly painting portraits from the 1850s until the 1890s<sup>257</sup>. However, figures provided by Caw show a significant decline in the number of portraits produced from the high point in the 1870s to the turn of the century. Caw lists forty-six portraits in the 1870s, thirteen in the 1880s and fourteen in the 1890s. The majority of the portraits during this period were commissioned works. During McTaggart's most productive period, for example, he painted five portraits of the children of J.C. Stevenson MP, three of which were exhibited at the RSA in 1871 and two at the RA in 1872<sup>258</sup>.

In the 1870s, in the eyes of the Scottish public, McTaggart would have appeared as much a portrait painter as he would a genre and landscape painter due to the fact that a high proportion of his public exhibits were portraiture. In 1871 and 1872, three out of six exhibits each year were portraits. In 1873, it was four out of seven and in 1874, five out of eight. This proportion does reduce slightly in the latter part of the 1870s. In 1872 McTaggart had moved to Hope Street in Edinburgh's New Town. This fashionable and central location was ideally suited for the

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<sup>257</sup> Caw *McTaggart*, 123.

<sup>258</sup> J. C. Stevenson was the Member of Parliament for South Shields.

studio of a portrait artist and it was from there that McTaggart attracted many commissions.

Caw suggests that it was wealthy businessmen and industrialists and not the Scottish aristocracy or the municipal magnates that sought commissions from McTaggart<sup>259</sup>. Many of these businessmen formed a relationship with McTaggart in the early 1860s. For example, Henry Gourlay commissioned a portrait of his children and posthumous portrait of his wife in 1877. In 1896 McTaggart painted the portrait of Baillie Duncan MacDonald as a presentation portrait from the City of Dundee that was his last major portrait commission. The very last commission seems to have been a posthumous portrait (untraced) of Mr John Hart, a Glasgow banker, in 1901.

During the 1890s and 1900s as McTaggart moved to his country retreat in Broomieknowe the number of commissions drops markedly. A large proportion of McTaggart's portraits during this period are of his family. A number of these portraits are in landscape settings, such as *Babbie and Hamish (1897)* a portrait of two of McTaggart's own children. This was almost certainly a studio composition in which McTaggart then proceeds to create an outdoor effect. It seems that during this later period, when finances were more secure and life more settled, McTaggart could choose what subjects he wanted to paint. This time should therefore be regarded as the ultimate expression of the artist's beliefs; not needing to paint endless commissions to make 'ends-meet'. The two portraits that seem to summarise this last period of the Scottish painter's life are: *Moss Roses* [Pl. 48] and *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn* [Pl. 49]; for McTaggart this was a time for family and stability.

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<sup>259</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 129.

The two family portraits represent a new beginning for William McTaggart, and his family, when they move to Broomieknowe on Whitsunday, 1889. Broomieknowe, the Mid-Lothian village, is situated seven miles south East of Edinburgh. Caw captures the rural retreat when he writes about the artist's new home, '...it nestles beside the river, the houses on that side look toward boldly silhouetted peaks of the Pentlands across the romantic woodland glen, through which the North Esk winds on its way from Hawthornden to Melville Castle', on the other side, '...the land slopes gently towards the sunrise and richly and softly undulating Lothian fields, between the two Esk rivers, spread out before one until beyond the low-lying woods at Newbattle Abbey.'<sup>260</sup> Situated in this idyllic landscape was Deanpark, the family home.

Within this country home McTaggart could protect his growing family. Within this domestic environment McTaggart was able to concentrate on his paintings. He painted the immediate environment and asked his many children to pose as models as in *The Harvest Moon* (1899) [Pl. 23] and *Broom, A June Day* (1904) [Pl. 54]. Many family holidays were taken which afforded opportunities to paint the household. A popular destination was Macrihanish where his children can be seen wading through the sea on his canvas – *Where the Birnie Runs Down to the Sea Macrihanish* (1904) [Pl. 55].

As well as a protected family retreat Broomieknowe allowed McTaggart to withdraw from the critical art world. Throughout the 1890s McTaggart displayed his paintings only on very rare occasions. He exhibited at the Glasgow Institute until 1896 and then ceased until 1901. It is interesting when observing the records that McTaggart sent paintings

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<sup>260</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 119.

to the Liverpool autumn exhibitions in 1893 but then not until 1905<sup>261</sup>. In the spring of 1891 McTaggart's active interest in the Royal Scottish Academy came to an end. The occasion was a Council meeting (13 March) and the case of David Farquharson. McTaggart felt that Farquharson had been mistreated by being 'struck off' the roll of those who were eligible for the pension fund. McTaggart simply protested and when he realised that his complaint was not being upheld quite simply exclaimed 'good-bye, gentlemen' and never returned for almost a decade. Therefore during the 1890s McTaggart had insulated himself from the gossip of the art world so that he could do his duty, as he told a friend, and that duty was to concentrate on his art<sup>262</sup>.

We also see that during 1890s McTaggart was more protected within himself. Although by no means a wealthy man McTaggart was able to purchase Dean Park House and continued to sell his paintings through the support and services of Peter McOmish Dott<sup>263</sup>. It was also noted by Errington that McTaggart, even when he was with his family, drifted off into his own world. The stories of the artist living in his own counsel are many. One of these accounts include the day when he was walking down the lane at Dean Park and encountered two of his own children. It was obvious that he felt he ought to know them, for he lifted his hat, but it was equally obvious that he did not remember who they were<sup>264</sup>. Therefore, this moment in McTaggart's life was a period of insular stability where the Scottish artist could increasingly express his own personal convictions on canvas. Before we move to the later paintings of William McTaggart, which are full of personal conviction

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<sup>261</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 92.

<sup>262</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 128.

<sup>263</sup> Dott toured an exhibition of thirty-two McTaggarts to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. This major selling exhibition was intended to raise funds for the ailing engineering business of McTaggart's eldest son.

<sup>264</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 90.

the thesis needs to consider the 'heart of McTaggart' and how he expressed this on canvas. We will then be in a position to see how he took subjects and tried to express his feelings. These feelings were often built upon the moment, in an instant of time, as in *Consider the Lilies* or looking back to a social history of Scotland as in the *Emigrant* series or a moment of religious significance such as the *Coming of St Columba*.

## 2.6 The Heart of McTaggart

When William McTaggart died in 1910 he was commonly known as an *Impressionist* painter. In contemporary thinking impressionism is associated with France and with leading artists of the movement such as Monet<sup>265</sup>. However, an understanding of an impressionistic approach would have been understood, with regards to McTaggart, within the British context and part of the wider critical approach of the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century. McTaggart's 'impressionistic' technique should be viewed as a gradual process of development over a number of years rather than a sudden change of direction due to external influence. The technique of impressionism, for McTaggart, was refined within the larger framework of trying to create a 'poetic landscape'.

If French Impressionism did not directly influence McTaggart's technique then we need to try and discover if the continental movement subtly changed the Scottish artist's practice. Caw maintains the argument that McTaggart was working independently but does note that the Scottish artist did see Monet at the turn of the century<sup>266</sup>. Caw was working on the generally held assumption that McTaggart was isolated

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<sup>265</sup> Claude Monet was born on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1840. In 1872, he painted *Impression, Sunrise* [Pl. 56] depicting a Le Havre port landscape. From the painting's title, an art critic coined the term 'impressionism'.

<sup>266</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 151.

from external influence due to the fact that he rarely made trips beyond Scotland and writers such as Hardie have sustained this view when he claims:

If one speaks, as some have done, of McTaggart's work as 'Scottish Impressionism', the term is justified at least in the national sense that outside influences which might have operated on McTaggart seem in fact to have had very little bearing on his work: he demonstrated an almost complete indifference to contemporary developments abroad.<sup>267</sup>

I must, at this point, disagree with Caw and Hardie and their assumption that McTaggart was an 'isolated innovator' of an impressionistic technique in Scotland without any reference to the outside world. The fact is McTaggart did visit many exhibitions both in London and Edinburgh where continental impressionism would have been on display. It is noted that French and Dutch paintings were exhibited in Scotland from the 1860s onwards<sup>268</sup>. French Impressionist paintings were exhibited in Scotland's capital city; for example, Pissarro put on view 3 works (1870), 9 works (1872), 4 works (1873) and 2 works (1875)<sup>269</sup>. In July 1883 Durand Ruel took Impressionism to London on a large scale exhibiting 65 works by the 'Society of French Impressionism'; many adverts of the exhibition appeared in *The Times*<sup>270</sup>. However, did the work of the Impressionists stand out and impress the Scottish artist? It

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<sup>267</sup> William Hardie, *Scottish Painting 1837-1939*, (London: Waverley Books Ltd, 1976,) 63.

<sup>268</sup> W. Armstrong, *Celebrated Pictures Exhibited at the Glasgow International Exhibition: Fine Arts Section*, (London, 1888), 61.

<sup>269</sup> Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) was at the beginning a leading light in the French Impressionist movement but by the 1880s had turned his back on the association (commonly referred to as neo-impressionism) and started to paint in his own words 'peasants working to make a living'.

<sup>270</sup> Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922) was a French art dealer who is associated with the Impressionists. He was one of the first modern art dealers who provided support for his painters with stipends and solo exhibitions. The London exhibition, at the Dowdeswell Gallery, included works such as Monet's *Autumn Effect at Argenteuil*.

seems reasonable to assume that McTaggart would have been drawn to the exhibitions; the Scottish artist was interested in colour and light which was reflected in the exhibition catalogue:

...new and unusual though their art may be, the connoisseur will recognise in the wonderful effects of light, the complete command of colour, and the faculty of delineating the more floating aspects to which landscape and the human figure are susceptible, a very interesting and distinctive factor in the art-work of modern times.<sup>271</sup>

A letter to McTaggart from John Pettie (postmark: London June 13<sup>th</sup> 1883) establishes that William McTaggart was in London during the French Impression exhibition. What is more interesting is that Caw states that from 1883 onwards McTaggart began to paint increasingly outside. However, for McTaggart painting *plein-air* was not strictly adhered to where subjects were started in the open but then were re-worked several times in the studio. Therefore, *The Storm* [Pl. 24] was painted on the spot in difficult weather but was then adjusted in the studio. It seems fair to conclude that McTaggart did not consciously apply impressionistic principles but rather the exhibitions of the Impressionists affirmed in McTaggart the direction that he had already begun and the technique that he had developed.

What seems more important to McTaggart was that impressionistic technique allowed the artist to express his internal emotions<sup>272</sup>.

McTaggart found a close and immanent sense of the divine in nature and expressed the emotions of the heart onto the canvas. On the other hand the subjects chosen by McTaggart increasingly had their reference in a

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<sup>271</sup> A. H. Palmer, "James Clark Hook RA", *The Portfolio*, 1888, 38-39.

<sup>272</sup> This was not an *expressionist* emotion (*expressionism* was a modernist movement originating in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century) as the expression of meaning was based upon the physical reality that McTaggart engaged with. An Impressionistic technique allowed a greater freedom when trying to capture both the subject and his inner emotions on the canvas.



different and more transcendent world, a cataclysmic storm or historic episodes of Scottish life. For McTaggart his impressionistic technique was subordinate to the subject and content. According to Caw McTaggart was less concerned with the practical features of painting 'than of the mental and emotional aspects of art'<sup>273</sup>. Caw illustrating McTaggart's interest in the spiritual or higher aims of art quotes a statement from the artist on William Frith; 'Frith was a truly admirable workman, a keen observer...but *commonplace*...his realm is most valuable, but not of the highest order...Such a one may give us brilliant description and narrative, keen analysis, and fine craftsmanship; but he is no poet.'<sup>274</sup>

In the nineteenth century to describe a work of art as being poetic was to lift the painting beyond pure representation. It is in this sense that Ruskin discusses the definition of great art in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. In this volume Ruskin asserts that the term 'great poet' could be applied to either a painter or writer. Of Landseer's *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* [Pl. 58] Ruskin writes, 'One of the most perfect poems or pictures which modern times have seen'<sup>275</sup>. With regard to landscape painting, for Ruskin Turner stands as an example of par-excellence; of Turner Ruskin claims, 'Increasingly calmly in power and loveliness, his work would have formed one mighty series of poems.... and that the landscape artist should not convey natural objects to the viewer but inform him of the thoughts and feelings with which these were first

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<sup>273</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 205.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. V., (London, J. M. Dent & Co., 1860), 87 – 92.

regarded by the artist himself<sup>276</sup>. Therefore, it is not only that nature is observable in a close and immanent sense but also the imagination of the Christian artist reconstitutes the observable objects of nature to express a sense of otherness and majesty in landscape art – an act of transcendence.

We therefore summarise by claiming that when we try to determine the religious outlook of the Scottish painter it was the ‘poetic landscape’ that was at the forefront of McTaggart’s art. McTaggart was interested in conveying the emotional and spiritual essence of his heart and the divine that he saw in nature and in the stories of Scottish history<sup>277</sup>. It therefore assumes that the impressionistic technique that McTaggart developed over a number of years was an instrument to convey these emotions. McTaggart’s Scottish Impressionism was developed in relative isolation but was affirmed by the broader continental movement of the time. But to McTaggart it was the ‘heart that mattered’ and technique was always subordinate and for the Scottish artist that heart was increasingly to be found in events and occurrences that were detached from the realities of modern life and beyond that which was experienced.

So far in this discussion I have considered how McTaggart dealt with both subject and technique. I would now like to discuss the inter-relation of subject and technique and how McTaggart integrates both. This is a subject matter that occupied the thoughts of McTaggart over a long period of time and may be described as a ‘poetic’ landscape in terms considered earlier. However, it also demonstrates McTaggart’s

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 454. Of course Turner becomes a main source of inspiration for *Impressionism* with both Monet and Pissarro studying the great landscape artist.

<sup>277</sup> The idea that McTaggart was ‘...conveying the emotional and spiritual essence of his heart...’ is a theme that is brought up by many commentators on the Scottish painter’s work including: Lindsay Errington quoting McTaggart when describing his art in the *Burlington Magazine*, ‘It’s the heart that’s the thing’, Lindsay Errington, “William McTaggart”, *The Burlington Magazine*, 1989, 732-733.

experimentation with the 'impressionistic' landscape notions of effect, unity and expansive vision.

Many contemporary critics regard McTaggart's use of figures in his landscape as a hindrance to the claim that the Scottish artist was a progressive independent and a forerunner of modern landscape art and an impressionist, comparable to but not derivative of the French Impressionists. For many McTaggart's inclusion of figures has the an element of Victorian sentimentalism which uses figure incidentally as a simple device to encourage popular appeal<sup>278</sup> This antagonistic sentiment towards what had gone before was becoming very evident in the writings of many art critics as the nineteenth century drew to a close. For example, MacColl claimed that imagination did not simply rest upon the introduction of figures into a picture with a sentimental title<sup>279</sup>. In the 1890s the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement had diminished and the New Art genre, which included impressionism, had taken hold. It would be my contention that McTaggart integrated his subject, which he cared passionately about, into the landscape using modern techniques.

There seems no evidence that McTaggart compromised his works for popular appeal. McTaggart did not paint 'rustic' genres as seen in the works of Cameron and Faed and he did not leave his native Scotland in search for greater popularity and wealth. Instead McTaggart bought a house just outside of Edinburgh and with independent financial means and academic freedom explored subjects of his own interest and experimented with artistic techniques. In doing so McTaggart produced works of art that were connected to the wider art movements but also expressed something of his own taste.

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<sup>278</sup> Edward Gage makes this point in *The Eye in the Wind*, (London: Collins, 1977), 15.

<sup>279</sup> MacColl, *Subject*, 1893.

What we see developing in McTaggart's work is a landscape with human involvement, that is, the subject and background are integrated. Later in this chapter I will consider two subjects that I will argue had deep and personal meaning for McTaggart – *The Emigrant* and *St Columba* series of paintings. Both subjects were not detached from the landscape but rather they were drawn out from the terrain that McTaggart had such an emotional attachment towards and to which he dedicated his life. Therefore when we consider the works of McTaggart we must steer interpretation of him from two extremes: He is not from the Pre-Raphaelite tradition that places an antagonism between figure and background nor is he a pure landscape artist in the tradition of Horatio McCulloch. An important moment in the transformation of McTaggart's religious outlook, where he begins to search for meaning in the past, at what he regarded as specific moments of divine revelation, is whilst he was painting a very contemporaneous piece of art – *Consider the Lilies*.

## 2.7 Consider the Lilies

The self-portrait and the painting of mother and child speak of a new stage in McTaggart's life. This was a time of comfort and relative prosperity when the Scottish artist could find space and create his 'own' compositions. During the 1890s McTaggart used this liberty to find expression in painting landscapes. However, though prosperous there were times of immense emotional turmoil: in the early part of the decade; McTaggart's son, Willie, was lost at sea and in the mid-1890s the artist suffered from a 'serious illness' which the doctors diagnosed as Bright's

disease<sup>280</sup>. We also witness times of joy in McTaggart's life as he watches his children grow up and after completing the most 'beautiful' time of rest at Macrihanish<sup>281</sup>, in the summer of 1895, the artist returns to his home to start painting *Consider the Lilies* [Pl. 69].

*Consider the Lilies* developed in a number of stages: the 1895 and 1896 compositions were painted in the studio before the larger version was painted outdoors in 1898. The painting is joyous and playful with warmth that spreads from the sky, through the shrubs to the children playing in the garden. There are two circles of children twisting and turning in the pleasant temperatures of a summer's day. The children, girls dressed in light coloured frocks and little boys in blue blazers and white shorts, dance as if they have no concerns for anything except for each other and the fun that they could share. Dividing the circles of children is a border of white Madonna lilies that stretch gracefully in a swaying line. Towards the back of the garden, amongst the trees and shrubs, is the roof of McTaggart's studio. From the studio the Scottish artist could peer out, observe, reflect and then turn his emotions to the canvas.

The elements of the painting, the children, the lilies and the studio with green shrubs, are brought together by the unified colour composition and the pursuit of naturalistic lighting. Therefore, the buff-coloured ground is not used simply to tone down the general effect of the painting but also to introduce a warm unifying hue, linking together other areas of cooler harsher colour. As well as providing a basis for the warm flesh tones of the figures, it also shows through in much of the painting of the

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<sup>280</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 134. Bright's disease is a historical classification of kidney diseases. The symptoms are usually severe including: back pain, elevated blood pressure, vomiting and fever.

<sup>281</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 132.

sky, creating a warm interlinking colour, suffusing the white and blues, and establishing a warm foil to the harsher and more saturated colour of the green foliage. Each element of the painting should, therefore, be regarded in terms of the whole and related to the title that it was given by the artist.

When considering *Consider the Lilies* a lot has been written about the singing games that the two circles of children were playing. Caw quite simply says that the children in the foreground are playing *Jing-a-Ring* whilst the circle of children in the background is in the 'gay' procession entitled *See the Robbers*<sup>282</sup>. Errington takes these two references and opens up a discussion on the probable exact title of the games and if in fact the children were playing a variant on the original titles quoted by Caw. Errington comes to the conclusion that the children in the distance were playing *Broken Bridges* and the children in the near ground were singing *Merrie-ma-tanzy*<sup>283</sup>. The art columns at the time also seemed to be overly concerned with the games the children were playing. The more prominent group in the foreground were variously described by the critics as playing: *Ging-a-ring* by the 'Black and White'; *Jing-a-ring* by the 'Glasgow Herald' and *Merr-ma-tanzy* by the 'Glasgow Daily Mail'. I would suggest that it is strange, and possibly a deliberate distraction, that the emphasis should be placed upon the children's singing games rather than McTaggart's overtly biblical title for the painting - *Consider the Lilies*.

The lilies themselves are located in the centre of the picture so that the eye is immediately drawn to them. The white flowers stretch from a wide border into an elegant swaying line and tower above both circles of children. Unlike the children whose flesh absorbs into the path and grass

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<sup>282</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 153.

<sup>283</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 102.

the white Madonna lilies are encased in the framework of green foliage constituted by the trees and shrubs. Therefore, it is the lilies that are the dominant feature of the painting. This dominance of creation over the human subject was found in many of McTaggart's paintings including, as previously noted, in *The Storm* [Pl. 24]. It is therefore the lilies that should be our focus of enquiry when considering the painting.

A second element of the painting, the studio, is also worthy of comment. Caw tells us that 'during the summer the big studio on the Knowles in the field on the eastern side of the garden at Deanpark was built'<sup>284</sup>. An undated photograph, taken in the summer due the fact that the lily boarder was in full bloom, gives the raw ingredients of the painting. Beyond the grass lawn the new studio can be viewed with its roof peering out. The construction of the studio, Caw informs us, was very practical so that the artist could have easy access to the garden but at the same time the view from the house was not diminished<sup>285</sup>. It might have been that during the long days at work in the studio McTaggart took a rest, peered into the garden and caught his children playing these enchanting circle games. Although a moment that inspired the Scottish artist to commence on the first two versions of *Consider the Lilies*, both paintings, Caw reports, were completed in the studio<sup>286</sup>.

I would, therefore, like to make the case that *Consider the Lilies* was a moment captured, rather than an imaginary composition, by considering the children in the painting. McTaggart nearly always paints rustic or fisher children set in the midst of wild nature. The children are often distracted, peering into the grass as the young girl to the right in *Blustery Weather* [Pl. 71] or the children are frolicking in the wilds of the

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<sup>284</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 133.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

ocean as we see in *Caught in the Tide* [Pl. 70]. However, *Consider the Lilies* provides a quite unique composition; Caw describes the painting as a 'garden picture' and 'the only one of the type he ever painted'<sup>287</sup>.

*Consider the Lilies* is a social painting of middle-class children, or as Caw describes them 'the better class', playing amongst trim lawns and cultivated flowerbeds. The assumption can be made that the children in the painting are his own, dressed in their own clothing and playing in their everyday surroundings.

Contemporaneous photographs portray groups of children on the beach wading through the surf's edge. The photographer was more than likely McTaggart's son Hugh and the location of the snapshot Machrihanish. The comparison between the photographs and the paintings at the seaside<sup>288</sup> location show the two social worlds that existed between the lives of McTaggart's offspring and the children depicted in the paintings. The children in the photographs are dressed as well-to-do late Victorians [Pl. 72]. Their heads are covered with wide-brimmed sunhats with ribbons or schoolboy caps. The girls' are wearing dark stockings, shoes or laced boots. For clothes they dressed in frocks, gathered from a shoulder yolk that hung loose around their knee. Underneath they may have put on laundered pinafores with the sleeves progressing to their wrists. On the other hand the children in the paintings were placed to fit with what was regarded as the natural composition of the beach. Most of them are bareheaded. The girls skirts are gathered up for action, the sleeves cut short or rolled up to expose bare arms. Baskets of fish often depict their natural rights to the sea. The children in the paintings often gaze out to the fishing vessels whilst McTaggart's family

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<sup>287</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 152.

<sup>288</sup> *Machrihanish, Bay Voyach, 1894* (for example).



are sailing toy yachts. It was therefore often the case that McTaggart would transform the middle class holiday into a world of fisher children and employ his own offspring as the models. However, *Consider the Lilies* is unique in the sense that this transformation does not take place and McTaggart captures his own family, as they really are – the late Victorian middle-class.

When pondering the title *Consider the Lilies* we are reminded by Caw that it should be admired for ‘its simple beauty rather than its moral significance’<sup>289</sup>. That is McTaggart did not paint with the intention of creating a narrative where the lilies are ‘preaching’ to the children. On this occasion I agree with Caw in that this was an instant of ‘simple beauty’. It is when the ageing artist walks out of his studio one summer’s afternoon and seizes a moment beyond that which is normally experienced. In that McTaggart experiences a heightened sense of emotions, a moment of divine revelation, that seems to create a change in direction in the believer’s life. The many years of struggle, painting for endless commissions, the unkind comments made by the art establishment and all the apprehension of life stopped for a moment as McTaggart watched his children play and the lilies spoke in their truest biblical sense – do not be anxious about anything. The quote from Luke’s Gospel<sup>290</sup> would have slipped into the Scottish artist’s mind as we are told by Caw that ‘the book he knew and loved the best was the Bible’<sup>291</sup>. Caw then tells us that the first two versions of *Consider the Lilies* were painted in the studio whilst the final composition was painted outdoors. In the third painting the models were his own children and their friends. Caw informs us that

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<sup>289</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 153.

<sup>290</sup> Luke 12:27

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

McTaggart got them to play so that he could 'visualise' their vitality that 'lives so vividly in this exquisite and spontaneous creation'.<sup>292</sup> The original moment may have passed but McTaggart would now, more than ever, delve deep within the soul and search for those subjects that brought 'spiritual' significance to his life: the migration of Scottish people from the west coast to America and the arrival of the Christian religion to his native land.

## 2.8 The Emigrant Series

Two major themes, which evoked passion to the paintings of McTaggart during the 1890s, were the St Columba series and the departure of Scottish emigrants to America. The sequences of paintings that constitute the emigrant paintings were completed in the early to mid 1890s. The first painting was entitled *Emigrants Leaving the Hebrides* (1890) [Pl. 73] and the last *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* (1895) [Pl. 75]. The two paintings that derive from the St Columba series were painted in the mid to later part of the 1890s and were *The Coming of St Columba* (1895) [Pl. 83] and *The Preaching of St Columba* (1897) [Pl. 84]. Errington reminds us that The Lilies, The Emigrant and St Columba series were 'the thoughts and feelings of the artist' and McTaggart was 'not working to commission'<sup>293</sup>. If painting *Consider the Lilies* was a moment of transcendence then both the Emigrant and Columba sequence of paintings went right into the depth of the soul and touched the very 'roots' of the artist, the 'roots' that went back into a distant past. The Emigrant series speaks of migration and loss whilst the twin paintings of St Columba address the themes of arrival and transformation. Both *The*

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>293</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 106.

*Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* and *The Coming of St Columba* remained in the hands of McTaggart's family after the artist's death.

During the 1890s a major theme for McTaggart to paint was the departure of Scottish emigrants to America. This developing subject contained a high emotional content for McTaggart and played upon the themes of homeland and loss. A number of paintings were completed with the emigrant theme including *Crofter Emigrants Leaving the West of Scotland* (1890) and studies of the three major pieces of work. The three renowned works of art on the emigrant theme are: *Emigrants Leaving Home* (1890) [Pl. 73], *The Emigrants* (1891 – 1894) [Pl. 74] and *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* (1895) [Pl. 75]. Each of these pieces of work conveys the dramatic relationship between humans and nature. These works are not figure subject paintings in the same vein as Thomas Faed's *Last of the Clan* [Pl. 76], where the landscape is simply a theatrical backdrop for the subject matter<sup>294</sup>. For McTaggart the subject of the Emigrants is closely associated with and a response to the landscape. Therefore, within this series of three paintings there is a deep emotional relationship between artist, figure and landscape. Each of these paintings should be regarded as an exploration of personal interest. McTaggart was not painting these works for public exhibition and the Emigrant pictures were not widely exhibited at shows during the artist's lifetime.

In each of the three emigrant paintings McTaggart is using his imagination and reflecting upon the memories of his childhood. By the late 1860s over eighty per cent of the emigrants travelling from Scotland to America went by steam ship and by the 1890s even the use of sails as

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<sup>294</sup> *The Last of the Clan* was inspired by the Highland Clearances which forced many to emigrate in search of a living, and shows the quayside of a Highland or island village, with a group of figures watching the departure of an emigrant ship for the colonies.

auxiliary power had passed<sup>295</sup>. It is therefore highly unlikely that during the 1890s emigrants from the west coast of Scotland were rowing out to embark on a three-masted, square-rigged vessel, from a lonely inhabited coast [Pl. 77]. It was more probable that most of the people who migrated across the Atlantic sailed from Glasgow on a steamer. The National Maritime Museum makes the case that the vessel in McTaggart's *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* [Pl. 75] is probably a 'bluff-bowed vessel of the mid-nineteenth century'<sup>296</sup>. It is therefore possible that McTaggart is looking back to the mid-century when the 'Gleaner' regularly sailed from Campbeltown to America. Nathaniel McNair, the local foundry and timber merchants, owned this ship. They pursued the emigrant trade to America and brought back shipbuilding timber<sup>297</sup>. In any case McTaggart is creating an historical subject within his imagination which he then wishes to incorporate into the natural surroundings of the west coast of Scotland.

As McTaggart looked back at his childhood it is quite possible that his memories conjured up images of real fear and the possibility of forced migration for his family<sup>298</sup>. A familiar sight for McTaggart would have been seeing his friends and neighbours being uprooted and leaving the country. McTaggart belonged to a small crofter family and whilst William was still young there were financial pressures upon the family at Aros; they were forced to move to nearby relatives and subsequently to Campbeltown; quite possibly, though, the family rights to dig peat for the local distilleries were sufficient to provide enough security. Some of the most active emigration took place in the 1840s and 50s throughout the

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<sup>295</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 106. An example of this would be the Steamship Britannia that travelled from Glasgow to New York and a mixture of people from both Scotland and Ireland.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Alasdair Carmichael, *Kintyre, Best of All Isles*, (Newton Abbott and London: 1974), p. 84

<sup>298</sup> The Gleaner that set sail from Campbeltown to New York in 1842 had a varied passenger list that included labourers, shoemakers and many farmers. [www.ralstongenealogy.com](http://www.ralstongenealogy.com)

West of Scotland. In the 1840s *The Scotsman* was full of accounts of the ships leaving port for the new opportunities to be found in North America. In 1842 *The Scotsman* reported the sailing of the 'Perthshire' from Glasgow to the USA and wrote, 'The passengers were all of a very respectable class, chiefly farmers with their friends and were in the best spirits.'<sup>299</sup> As time moved from the 1850s to the 1890s, when McTaggart was painting his series of paintings, there was an increasing sense of forced optimism with regards emigration. Although the dangers were fully recognised, there was also positive stories being sent back to Scotland and links with the home country were established, including the 'Kintyre Club'<sup>300</sup>.

However, we are reminded by Caw that the whole episode of emigration and highland clearances 'haunted' McTaggart<sup>301</sup>. As McTaggart began his studies for the *Emigrant* series in the 1880s an account of the *Highland Clearances* (1883) was published and the Crofter's Commission was appointed to look at the questions of eviction, land ownership and emigration<sup>302</sup>. In the mind of many at the time was the assumption that the Highlanders had almost mystical rights to share in the clan lands that had been removed by the English government after the Jacobite Rebellion and any further displacement of the local Scots stirred up deep emotions and may be seen as the background for the emergence of McTaggart's paintings.

Another source of inspiration for McTaggart's paintings might have come from one of several artists who had been painting on the

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<sup>299</sup> *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1842

<sup>300</sup> The Kintyre Club was formed in 1825 and continued with 150 years of service until it was wound up in 1981.

<sup>301</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 169.

<sup>302</sup> The *Napier Commission* was established in 1883. This was a Royal Commission that looked into the condition of crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

theme of emigration; these include: Ford Madox Brown *The Last of England* (1852 – 1855) [Pl. 78], Richard Redgrave *The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home* (1859) [Pl. 79] and Erskine Nicol *An Irish Emigrant Landing at Liverpool* (1871) [Pl. 80]. Overall, however, this subject does not appear to be popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>303</sup>. This might have been because political sensitivity of the subject or a large amount of emigration in Scotland took place from the rural areas that were far removed from the art- buying metropolises of Glasgow and Edinburgh. A number of artists deal with the dignity of peasant life in the face of adversity including Hugh Cameron's *A Lonely Life* (1873) [Pl. 81] but few with the specific subject of emigration. It seems that McTaggart explored the theme of migration due to the fact that it affected him personally. McTaggart was from the poor rural class in his childhood and emigration was a very real possibility for both him and his family. Whatever the artistic context was for McTaggart very little is known but in the late nineteenth century McTaggart starts on a series of three paintings that seemed quite close to the artist's own background and passion.

### 2.8.1 Emigrants Leaving the Hebrides (1883 -1890)

McTaggart, according to Caw, first explores the subject of emigration in a small oil sketch entitled – *Anxious Enquiries* (1860). The painting comprises of a harbour scene with figures and luggage and there is a rowing boat with a large sailing vessel in the distance<sup>304</sup>. Caw states that a larger canvas (untraced) exists which is a re-working of the emigrant theme and was also named *Anxious Enquirers* (1891 – 1895). The first accepted treatment by McTaggart of the subject of emigration is

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<sup>303</sup> Very few exhibitions dealt with the subject of emigration as listed by Frank Rinder. Frank Rinder and W. D. McKay, *The Royal Scottish Academy 1826 – 1916*, Glasgow, 1917.

<sup>304</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 279.

recognised in the canvas named *Word from the West* (1864). The title of the painting closely resembles other works of art of the time including: *Answering the Emigrant's Letter* (1850, RA, James Collinson) [Pl. 82] and *The Emigrant's First Letter from Australia to His Wife* (1874, RSA, Charles Lees). Each painting relates the subject of emigration to a piece of correspondence to a loved one from a distant land. In McTaggart's version there is a girl reading a letter to her family from a relation who has emigrated.

The first of the three established works of art completed by McTaggart on this subject of emigration was completed in 1890 and was named *Emigrants Leaving the Hebrides* [Pl. 73]. Caw affirms that the painting was called the 'Blue Emigrants' by the family due to the intense blue and blonde colours. The painting was started in 1883 at Carradale and was painted outdoors<sup>305</sup>. On inspection of the painting it seems probable that the figures were added later; the people and the distant ship are painted on top of the landscape. There seems a story for every figure and their demeanour looks sorrowful against the backdrop of the bright blue sea. Caw states that there is a mingling of fears with hopes but the whole aspect of the picture was too fair and bright to express the full emotional significance of Highland emigration<sup>306</sup>. McTaggart therefore quickly moved on and started the second painting in the series.

### 2.8.2 The Emigrants (1891 – 1894)

When comparing the first and second emigrant paintings it is noticeable that the compositions are almost identical; that is, the headland, the grouping of individuals and the position of the boat are almost the same in both paintings. However, there seems to be a great

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 170.

difference between the two paintings with regard to the conception and construction. On the second version the ship seems woven into the sea rather than painted on top. There is a greater use of hues in the treatment of sky and sea. The sky consists of yellow, greens and red while the sea comprises of yellow and greens. There is also an extensive use of whites to highlight the hues. The figures on the later version are painted over basic ground colour and not land / seascape. I would like to suggest that it is possible that the second version was painted in the studio using the 1890 painting as a source.

What McTaggart appears to have constructed in the second canvas is retention of the composition but a change in effect using technique. The figures are more absorbed into the landscape. A rainbow has been introduced to heighten the drama and possibly display a symbol of hope. The word 'America' has been placed upon the luggage in the foreground to emphasise the subject of emigration. Overall the colours of the painting allow the landscape to create a drama in which the human subjects are participating. This drama is re-enforced by various titles that have been used for the painting both in the sales of replicas and exhibitions. A replica was sold to Peter McOmish Dott in 1898 with the title, 'Crofters Leaving Hebrides for America in Threatening yet Hopeful Weather'<sup>307</sup>. In the same vein when the painting was exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1901 it was accompanied in the catalogue with the lines, 'In Storm and Sunshine; Mixed with Fears and Hopes From their Rude Island Homes to Distant Lands they Went'<sup>308</sup>.

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<sup>307</sup> The picture was found in Dott's book in the 1901 exhibition.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 272. There is a possibility that the piper was playing Allan Ramsay's lament that evoked *Highlander's nostalgia*:  
*Farewell to Lochaber, farewell to my Jean*  
*Where heartsome wi' her I ha'e many days been*  
*For Lochaber no more, we'll maybe return*  
*We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more.*



Caw reminds us that the second version was one of the largest canvases that McTaggart had ever painted<sup>309</sup> and that the progress of the painting was comparatively slow. The painting consists of waving girls, children with their dogs, an old man blessing his daughter, men carrying goods aboard the fishing boats and a piper in the bow of a boat reputedly playing 'Lochaber no more'<sup>310</sup>. The atmosphere is stark and the afternoon is accumulating rain-clouds. The impending rain speaks of the tears that are felt upon the grassy bank where the bitterness of the looming separation is evident. The rainbow, however, reminds us that amongst the tears there are smiles and hope as they look towards the impending adventure.

The piper who, let us say, is playing 'Lochaber no more' is difficult to locate on first inspection but he is there in the fishing boat pulling out from the cove. The piper, and the playing of the lament, is part of the popular mythology of Scottish emigration scenes. Two paintings of the period captured the scene of the lone piper and emigration. Robert Herdman's depiction of crofting eviction, *Landless and Homeless: Farewell to the Glen* (1887), had the associated label in the catalogue – 'Maybe to return to Lochaber no more'. More explicitly Watson Nicol's painting of two emigrants departing on a boat with all their worldly goods and a dog was actually titled *Lochaber no More*<sup>311</sup> [Pl. 63]. McTaggart wanted to capture in some way this feeling of loss in the emotionally charged atmosphere of his painting. Therefore, we have the lone piper playing 'Lochaber no More' and at the same time there is the luggage blazoning the word AMERICA in the foreground of the picture. As one critic at the end of the nineteenth century made clear, 'It is the epic of

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>311</sup> Errington, *William McTaggart*, 108.

depopulation, emigration and of quests in foreign lands. It tells of laments abroad for 'my ain countrie', and of breaking hearts at home. It is greater, more thrilling and powerful than *Lochaber no More*<sup>312</sup>.

### 2.8.3 The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship (1895)

The last of the emigrant series *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* [Pl. 75] was painted with haste with what seems to have been the final scrapings of the palate in 1895. The composition is similar to the previous two paintings; we have the same headland and the same expanse of sea. It appears that this final episode is a progression in the series of work. The ship has sailed from right to left and is about to leave the field of view. The bustling crowd on the headland has now dispersed leaving, as in Faed's *Last of the Clan* [Pl. 76], only the remnants of the community. The rainbow has almost left the sky and the feeling has changed from sadness mixed with hope to a much more sombre view.

The time is near sunset and the moment captures a depth of silence as the ship and headland are communicating no more; this is re-enforced by the placing of both the ship and headland in the shadows, which is separated by a beam of white. On close inspection it becomes obvious that even though the pain of parting is over, the bitterness of separation remains. There is the hush of stillness coming from the great sails of the ship and on the shore there remain a few isolated watchers, an old man and woman bent over and watching the ship and a girl with her back to the disappearing vessel and her head looking towards the ground, clutching a baby. Just off shore, in the rocky cove below, fishers are tying up their boats that had once taken the passengers to the ship. The lone piper that played *Lochaber no More* has gone and all that remains is a

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

collie howling a lament into the air. McTaggart captures in this final scene the great depths of silent loss and a benediction of love for that which was but is no more. This sense of melancholy and loss equates to the concept of transcendence in that there is something in the contemporary that is not quite right and there is a search for a moment in history when things were more, as they should be. However, when it comes to the religious paintings of St Columba something different seems to be happening.

## 2.9 St Columba

In 1897 great celebrations took place on the island of Iona to commemorate the thirteenth centenary of the death of St Columba (8<sup>th</sup> June, 597). In spite of this McTaggart did not choose the small island off the coast of Mull for the setting of his two paintings on the theme – *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] and *The Preaching of St Columba* [Pl. 84] – and I would like to challenge the assumption made by Caw with regards the date of 1897 for the commencement of the series of paintings<sup>313</sup>.

McTaggart randomly chose Gauldrons Bay, a short walk from Macrihanish, for the location to paint the St Columba series; he would remark, 'The great fact was not that Columba landed in Iona, but that he came to Scotland'<sup>314</sup>. Legend has it that St Columba and his companions sailed eighteen miles in frail coracles and landed in Kintyre (part of the then Scottish kingdom of Dalriada) and upon gaining permission from the local king established a home-base on Iona. On the Southside of Kintyre there are footprint indentations in rock that are said to be from the first

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<sup>313</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 172.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

landing of St Columba; McTaggart would have known this place and the various stories would have grown since that first coming.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was an increasing awareness, probably due to the celebrations on Iona, of St Columba and all things Celtic. Contained within McTaggart's own personal collection were two books: St Adamnan's *Prophecies, Miracles and Visions of St Columba* (1895)<sup>315</sup> and Magnus Maclean's *The Literature of the Celts, its History and Romance* (1902)<sup>316</sup>. These books expressed many of the sentiments of the time with regard to Columba in that he was regarded as the bringer of not only religion but also a new civilisation to Scotland. Therefore, Maclean would state, 'The religious and literary dawn that lit up Ireland in the fifth century reached Scotland in the sixth through the advent of the heroic Columba...he too...with even more brilliance and learning did for Scotland what St Patrick did for Ireland'. Consequently when McTaggart paints *The Coming* with Columba standing at the helm with the blue sky and tranquil sea there is a 'spring like' expectancy conveyed.

The subject of Columba was linked in the public imagination to the wider Celtic civilisation and the current plight of the Crofters. Professor Blackie a self-appointed champion of the Crofters, published in 1885, *The Scottish Highlanders and the Land Laws*<sup>317</sup>. Blackie wrote two poems on the theme of Columba in 1872: *The Voyage of St Columba* and *The Death of St Columba* – both were published in *Lays of the Highlands*

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<sup>315</sup> J. T. Fowler, *Prophecies, Miracles and Visions of St Columba written by St Adamnan (Ninth Abbot of Iona, A.D. 679 – 704)*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1895).

<sup>316</sup> Magnus Maclean. *The Literature of the Celts, its History and Romance*. (London. Blackie and Son Ltd. 1902).

<sup>317</sup> John Stuart Blackie (1809–1895) was born in Glasgow and was educated at the New Academy and then later Marischal College in Aberdeen.

*and Islands*<sup>318</sup>. Blackie wove the figure of St Columba into an understanding of what it meant to be Celtic; a Chair in Celtic Studies was established at Edinburgh University and there was a revival in Celtic learning in the late nineteenth century. Blackie's poems inspired many artists of the day including Robert Gibb who painted *Columba in Sight of Iona* and the *Death of St Columba*<sup>319</sup>. It was in the light of this renewed interest in St Columba that McTaggart began to paint *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] and *The Preaching of St Columba* [Pl. 84] in the 1890s. In these paintings we see the continuing revelation of Celtic civilisation and the Christian Faith.

### 2.9.1 The Coming of St Columba

It was said, by Caw, that McTaggart would look at his depiction of *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] and exclaim, 'What a day for such a mission'<sup>320</sup>. The Scottish artist in this painting has created a scene that stirs the spirits and lifts the emotions. Unlike the *Emigrant* series that leaves the viewer feeling sombre at the sense of loss the *Columba* paintings creates in the onlooker the sentiment of hope at something gained.

The moment chosen by McTaggart for the mission was a lazy slumberous day in the early stages of summer. The sunlight glints through the thin veneer of clouds that fill the sky. This light from the sun then glitters upon the sea as the water moves slowly but purposefully forward. The horizon is faint and is far in the distance. The whole painting depicts the natural world as delicate but with power to unfold the story of the arrival of the foreign missionary. The wide sky leads down to

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<sup>318</sup> John Stuart Blackie, *Lays of the Highlands and Islands*, (London Strathan & Co, 1872).

<sup>319</sup> Robert Gibb (1845 – 1932) was an artist who built his reputation upon painting romantic, historical and military paintings,

<sup>320</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 172.

the curl of water upon the sea that gently breaks upon the golden sand that leads up to the rocks and green knoll.

Upon the green grassy headland there are three figures that are meant to depict the careless 'Scottish heathen' at play unaware of the momentous unfolding story. There is a woman with a white scarf around her head and playing with a child. The third person is a tall red haired man, wearing what looks like a brown tunic and who is looking seaward. Out at sea there are two white sailboats, coming silently and carrying the missionaries of the cross. Whilst the man lying on the grass is wearing a rough old brown garment the man standing at the helm of the coracle, presumably St Columba himself is dressed in white. The scene displays what an onlooker who seemingly was there at the right moment would have viewed.

The colours that are employed by McTaggart are used with a purpose. Gone are the shades of brown that commonly gave Scottish art a rather gloomy feel and now tones are used that bring feelings of light and life. The silver light that dominates the sea and the sky is interjected with rosy purples and light hues of green. The grass exhibits a deeper green than the sea whilst the rocks that surround the shore are a mixture of bronze and purple. In the foreground there is the gold colour of the sand. It seems that the colours were mixed to give a feeling of wholeness whilst the human drama blends into the unfolding scene.

### 2.9.2 The Preaching of St Columba

As the scene moves from *The Coming* to *The Preaching of St Columba* the atmosphere changes from the 'spring of hope' to the deep 'warmth of arrival'. *The Preaching of St Columba* [Pl. 84] is a larger canvas and retains the same setting, Gauldrons Bay, but with a more

expansive view. The colours used by McTaggart are now deeper and richer. There is less cloud cover in the sky and between whispers of white there is a more intense hue of blue. The sea glides from right to left striking the rocks in the distance and rippling into the golden sand. Unlike the Emigrant paintings where a rainbow was employed to break the gloom of the sky the end of the rainbow shines down upon the headland of green grass and sand; this for McTaggart is the place of expectancy.

Standing upon this headland, where the sand meets the sea, stands a man with his hands stretched into the sky; giving both a gesture of welcome and symbolising the message he was about to proclaim. For McTaggart this was a moment of intense importance, this was the moment when Christianity first touched the shores of Scotland. The figure, which we can presume to be St Columba, is dressed in white and complements his 'saints' who are sitting either side. The eye is drawn to this messianic figure but the figure itself is diminutive in comparison to the size of the canvas. The viewer is reminded that it is to the whole of Scotland that the message of the cross is brought and upon that day the whole of creation sang, land and sea.

The oration on the headland resembles the setting of the 'Sermon on the Mount'. The 'Christ-like' figure robed in white preaches to the crowds of onlookers who crouch in huddles and listen to the new words of teaching. In the foreground children lounge in the sun, talking and are unaware of the significance of the events unfolding on the beach. In the near-distance the coracles are left on the beach depicting a journey's end. If *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] portrays strength peering through the delicacy of the painting, then *The Preaching of St Columba* [Pl. 84] illustrates power but handled in a sensitive way; McTaggart developed his technique in order to paint his emotions.

To allow McTaggart to get close to the subject of his heart – his homeland, he began to paint outdoors *en plein air*<sup>321</sup>. Caw states that the starting point for his move towards *en plein air* was *The Storm* [Pl. 24] in 1883. In painting *The Storm* McTaggart sets out a pattern that he kept to for the rest of his painting life. He would commence by painting the great scene of nature, come wind or rain, outdoors and then retreat to the studio to add figures and finish the painting. So, for example, the paintings of St Columba remained on the easel for a number of years but initially they were painted outdoors.

In both *The Coming* and *Preaching of St Columba* the foreground figures seem to be out of focus. McTaggart employs a sketchy brushwork technique and white impasto has been scrambled in the foreground to give the effect of blending the figures into the landscape<sup>322</sup>. McTaggart also distorts and elongates his figures in a way that reflects the works of Henry Moore and Alexander Nasmyth. In *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] the reclining characters are extended and flattened as they make contact with the ground. Critics of the period described McTaggart's later works as *unfinished* due to his treatment of his figures but in some way the people that are depicted are alive and blend into rather than dominating the landscape.

When considering *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83] the viewer is absorbed into this large and vibrant canvas. McTaggart employs a narrow tonal range and abandons the 'chiarosaro' structure used by artists such as McCulloch. If one compares, for example, McTaggart's *The Coming of St*

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<sup>321</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 197.

<sup>322</sup> Exhibition Catalogue with preface by Edward Pinnington, Edinburgh, 1901.



*Columba* with McCulloch's *Loch Katrine* [Pl. 84a] the same physical structure of fore, middle and far distance can be observed but the colour structure is different<sup>323</sup>. McTaggart increases the tonal value but then uses white pigment to merge the zones together in order to create unity and it is the brushwork technique that brings the painting to a conclusive whole<sup>324</sup>. In the 1890s McTaggart uses technique in order to express emotion in his art. It is now important to place a date upon the St Columba series in order to derive a clue with regard to what emotions McTaggart was trying to express.

Caw wishes to attribute a date of 1897 to both *The Coming of St Columba* and *The Preaching of St Columba*. This plausible suggestion would connect the two works of art with the celebrations on Iona of the thirteenth century death of St Columba (8 June, 597). Caw explains that McTaggart was 'stirred by the accounts of Columba and his mission...of which he felt drawn to paint a picture which would be connected in some way to the advent of Christianity in Scotland'<sup>325</sup>. It is important to note that McTaggart does not look to the contemporary Scottish Church but rather links his faith to a moment of revelation in history, possibly when the Christian faith was unblemished, in respect to the subject of his painting McTaggart is working within the framework of transcendence. The actual date, following Caw's line of reason, on which McTaggart paints *The Coming of St Columba*, is 1898. However, I would like to suggest that this is wrong. On closer inspection of the date there is also a

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<sup>323</sup> Horatio McCulloch (1805–1867) was a Scottish landscape artist who specialised in painting the Scottish Highlands.

<sup>324</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 239.

<sup>325</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 172.

possibility that Caw had made a mistake; the final number '8' looks more like a figure '5' which would date *The Coming of St Columba* as 1895<sup>326</sup>.

There was a study of *The Coming of St Columba* which is clearly dated 1895 and it would be fair to assume that this was the date that McTaggart began and completed his final composition. If 1895 was the date that McTaggart painted *The Coming of St Columba* then the external celebrations that were taking place on Iona in 1897 become less relevant and we must, therefore, examine other sources of influence. It could be argued that a major stimulus upon the work of McTaggart in the 1890s was the 'freedom' that he had found to explore the issues that he had cared about for many years. This 'freedom' was built upon the foundations of a secure family life at Broomieknowe where he was liberated from economic worries and artistic criticism. McTaggart with an uninhibited technique was free to explore the subjects of his interest.

Therefore, in 1895 McTaggart paints three major paintings and explores two important historical themes that speak in some way about the depth of the soul of the Scottish artist. These three works of art were: *Consider the Lilies* [Pl. 69], *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* [Pl. 75] and *The Coming of St Columba* [Pl. 83]. If, as in a previous section has been argued, *Consider the Lilies* was a moment of transcendence and change in direction that brought into focus both the years of inner turmoil and the new possibilities for personal expression, then it was this instant that provided the impetus for the two historical themes that would be McTaggart's legacy – the Scottish artist looked beyond the intimate and that which could be affected by the world and human subjects to a moment in history, a time of divine revelation, that would be untarnished by the modern world.

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<sup>326</sup> This case was argued in Errington, *William McTaggart*, 153.

*The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* was the culmination of a decade of thought and exploration into the migration of the Scottish people from the west coast to America and beyond. The painting completed in 1895 speaks of both departure and loss. The feeling of loss pointed to a homeland that McTaggart constantly sought to find, it was the homeland of his religious imagination. In McTaggart's vision there was an image of an idealised homeland that existed before the intense period of migration and highland clearances, a homeland where both humans and nature existed in harmony. This homeland never existed in reality but was a transcendent image, a kind of heaven. In 1895 McTaggart set off exploring the second major theme of his work *The Coming of St Columba*. This painting is separated from *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* by one thousand years of 'Celtic' civilisation and points to arrival and something found. This 'something found' was the essence of God woven into nature that provided a framework for his search for the divine in both landscapes and seascapes, a search that often took McTaggart from the mundane to the majestic – from immanence to transcendence.

Both *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship* and *The Coming of St Columba* remained in the hands of the artist's family after the death of William McTaggart; one speaking of departure and the other arrival to the same part of Scotland by boat. However, as the two paintings hung on the wall of the family home maybe they spoke of something deeper that happened in the Scottish artist's life: the intense search for the spiritual in the material world and a search for otherness, beyond the everyday.

### 3.0 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the work of William McTaggart and have found that both his Christian and artistic journey replicates

much of the tension that was found in Victorian society, that is the desire to live in the contemporary world with its strong inclination towards progress and improvement whilst at the same time to look, with strong feelings of nostalgia, to an idealised past. In many ways these tensions in Victorian life overlap with the theological framework as presented in the thesis. In that for many Victorians they found solace in a transcendent God; a God that existed beyond the normal experiences of life and could often be located in history, at specific moments of revelation. William was born into a deeply religious family who, after the Disruption of 1843, became members of the Free Church. McTaggart was baptised into the Christian Church, attended church, became a Church Elder and was finally buried in church; he had each of his children baptised and we are told that the book he knew and loved the best was the Bible. In all William McTaggart was a Christian man whose artistic journey was intrinsically linked to his inner journey of faith.

In the *Past and the Present* William was expressing that the divine is not always found in the crumbling walls of the ancient church and its teachings but found in the fabric of the living, the hope of youth and the continuous revelation in human progress. The dark shadow stretched over the church and the elderly man sitting in its shadows; whilst the light shone on the young builders, surrounded by the living foliage and ultimately upon the girl who was standing and gazing into the distance. The girl might have glimpsed *Spring* where the natural surroundings were gaining a prominence in McTaggart's works of art, displaying how the artist felt that God had meant things to be. However, the immanence of McTaggart's work, in *Spring*, was limited to the idealised understanding of rural life and refrained from the proximity of the harsh realities of the urban and industrial.

*The Storm* is regarded by many as William McTaggart's finest work of art. This high accolade might, in some part, be due to both the sheer size and complexity of the painting. At one level *The Storm* portrays a piece of art that is very intimate, finding the divine in the very nature that McTaggart experience at first hand, a strong inclination towards immanence. In that the brush strokes that he makes upon the canvas are an intermediary between nature and the Scottish artist's inner emotions. On the other hand the scale of the art and the immensity of the storm has something quite unreal about its appearance and surely points to a sense of otherness. Both the ability to find meaning in the material world and beyond, coexistence between immanence and transcendence, existed within one work of art.

This complex mixture of emotions probably expresses something of the inner turmoil of the Scottish artist, which in some way replicates the tension at the heart of Victorian society, the witnessing of the decay of many important elements of Christian faith. We should not underestimate how the changes in Victorian society affected the west coast Scottish artist. The Bible and its teachings were an important foundation for William's life, as were the many sermons that he would have heard that re-enforced the orthodox teachings of the Church. As an Elder in the Presbyterian Church McTaggart would have made promises to uphold the inherited truths of divine providence. This inner turmoil ultimately leads McTaggart to Broomieknowe. At his country retreat McTaggart discovers a sense of stability and security that he had been missing during the earlier years of his painting career.

It was whilst McTaggart was at Broomieknowe that he had the possibility of discovering within himself those things that had real meaning in his life. William would divide his life between his art and his

extensive family. It was during this mixture of work and domesticity that William had, I would like to suggest, an experience of the divine, beyond the normal experiences of life, which he expressed in the unique canvas - *Consider the Lilies*. It seemed that at this moment of transcendence that the years of work and pressure were lifted from the shoulders of the Scottish artist leaving him to paint what was really close to his heart. In doing so McTaggart chose two historical subjects *The Leaving of the Emigrants* and *The Coming of St Columba*. In both instances McTaggart was seeking specific moments of divine revelation in the history of Scotland. In *The Leaving of the Emigrants* William was searching for a lost homeland and in *The Coming of St Columba* McTaggart was seeking the ancient Celtic faith of Scotland which was interwoven with the landscape and seascape of the west coast.

In drawing this conclusion it would be fair to say that William McTaggart expressed both a sense of immanence and transcendence in both individual works of art and throughout his artistic life. With regard to immanence McTaggart found meaning in the representation of everyday material objects and with regard to transcendence McTaggart searched for understanding in the majestic, that which could not normally be experienced and in the history of Scotland. In very simplistic terms McTaggart expressed his sense of the immanent divine through the employment of his technique of brushstroke upon the canvas and the search for another world through the subjects he chose and his religiously informed imagination. In all McTaggart replicates much of the tension at the heart of Victorian life by living and being part of a world that really existed but on many occasions sought God in a different reality and in a different place. McTaggart lived with immanence but searched for the transcendent.

## Chapter 3: William Dyce

William Dyce shares two obvious similarities with McTaggart; they were both Scottish and both enjoyed painting the landscapes of Scotland. However, in many ways they were very different people. William Dyce was born to an affluent and well-educated family on the east coast of Scotland. Dyce's family were high church Episcopalians and William himself seriously considered training for the ordained ministry. When one considers the life and painting of William Dyce and tries to understand the tension that existed between painting in the world as it was and searching for another world, it comes as no surprise that he contributes to the living art of faith something quite different and distinct to McTaggart.

### 3.1 The Life of William Dyce

William Dyce was born on 19 September 1806 in a large, terraced granite house in Marischal Street, Aberdeen. Forty-eight Marischal Street was an austere house that was situated within a narrow street that sloped steeply down towards the harbour at one end and up towards the municipal buildings at the other. The hustle and bustle of the harbour would have provided a lot of amusement for the young Dyce as he was growing up and maybe as he peered towards the open sea he dreamt of the foreign lands that he would one day be privileged to visit. At the top of the hill were the municipal buildings, which predominantly comprised of the Town Hall and Marischal College, giving Dyce a glimpse of the education and the corridors of power in which one day he would walk.

The parents of William Dyce were both members of families that had strong connections with the city of Aberdeen; Margaret Chalmers

was William's mother but the person who had the strongest influence over all the family was William's father, Dr William Dyce. William senior was one of fourteen children, of whom, all six boys were to follow their father into Marischal College and study medical science. Dr William Dyce was a lecturer in Medicine at Marischal College, which was to become part of the University of Aberdeen<sup>327</sup>, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. It was said that Dr William Dyce was 'a physician of considerable repute and a man of great scientific attainments. He was constantly employed in matters of Philosophical, Chemical and Mechanical Science.'<sup>328</sup>

It can be said that William Dyce, despite moving to the south of England, maintained strong links with his native Scotland. Many of his paintings, including *Gethsemane* (1855) [Pl. 86] and *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (1860) [Pl. 85] were painted in the wild rocky terrain of Aberdeenshire. Dyce also retained strong ecclesiastical relations with affairs north of the border. In 1857 for example William wrote to John Webster, the Provost of Aberdeen, with regards the stained glass windows of Glasgow Cathedral.<sup>329</sup> However, one needs to argue against the claim made by Marcia Pointon that Dyce 'never accepted the role of an urbanised London artist'<sup>330</sup> when after acquiring a substantial sum of money he decided to spend the rest of his days living in suburban London.

Educationally William Dyce succeeded at an early age: he was awarded a Master's Degree in Medicine at only 17, in 1823. He had been educated at school in, Latin and Greek, and was to draw on the traditions

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<sup>327</sup> The University of Aberdeen was created after the merger of Marischal College and King's College, Aberdeen in 1860 under the terms of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1858.

<sup>328</sup> Aberdeen Art Gallery, The Dyce Papers (unpublished), D. P. I

<sup>329</sup> D.P. XXXVI, Dyce to John Webster, 25 March 1857.

<sup>330</sup> Marcia Pointon, *William Dyce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 4.



of Ancient Greece and Rome to illustrate his work of art. After completing his studies at Aberdeen Grammar School William followed the family tradition and entered Marischal College to study medicine. In 1827, Dyce painted *Bacchus Nursed by the Nymphs of Nysa* [Pl. 87], which was accompanied by a Greek quotation from one of the Homer hymns to Dionysus. In many ways William was a Victorian polymath, a man who took a deep interest in a wide range of subjects. Therefore, we see Dyce writing about the *Baths of Titus*<sup>331</sup> and competing for the Blackwell prize, at Marischal College, for his work on 'The Relations between the Phenomena of Electricity and Magnetism and the Consequences Deducible from those Relations'<sup>332</sup>. Therefore, Dyce's academic interests were at the same time contemporaneous and classical.

As well as being academically strong, William Dyce was also a man of faith. Upon completing his medical studies Dyce intended to read theology at Oxford with the intention of entering Holy Orders. William's family were Episcopalian with close relatives already ordained. Dyce, however, never took Holy Orders but distinguished himself as a High Anglican artist and ecclesiological designer. William's interest in physical science did not mean that he was a modern in his attitudes to faith. On the contrary, Dyce tried to retain the conviction of a divinely ordered system in the face of the gradual destruction of traditional patterns of belief<sup>333</sup> that characterised the later 1800s. Therefore, right from the very start William found the divine in tradition and things from the past. For William God ordered the world but also ordered, in a personal way, his

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<sup>331</sup> D.P. I. The baths of Titus were public baths built in Rome in A.D. 81.

<sup>332</sup> Marischal College minutes, 16 Nov 1830.

<sup>333</sup> With regards to physical science William suggested, '...like a continual journeying, the object of which, has been, and still is to contemplate by every light and on every side, the perfecting system of nature'. Aberdeen University Library, MS. M263

life. In 1849 William wrote to his future wife declaring, ‘...in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy steps’<sup>334</sup>.

As being well-travelled Dyce was highly cultured and well connected: he made strong ties with some of the leading lights of Victorian Britain including William Gladstone, Sir Charles Eastlake<sup>335</sup> and Beresford Hope<sup>336</sup>. In July 1825 William took his first tentative steps to move from his family home to study at the Royal Academy in London. It appears from Dyce’s letters that he felt an intense frustration at the education offered at the Royal Academy and decided to move to Rome in the autumn of 1825<sup>337</sup>. During his brief period in London William had developed a friendship with Alexander Day, an art dealer and portrait painter, and by the time he had moved to Rome he had secured both connections and accommodation.

The *Roma e gli Inglesi* lists Dyce as a student of the British Academy. It was through the Academy that Dyce was able to develop a circle of friends that would support the young Scottish artist as he developed his technique and absorbed all that Rome had to offer. A number of years later Dyce wrote to his friend David Scott, ‘In truth Rome is a kind of a living poem, which the soul reads unceasingly, with a soothed sense which poetry inspires’<sup>338</sup>. One of the more cultivated figures that Dyce was to meet in Rome was Baron Bunsen<sup>339</sup>. There is some uncertainty when William met Bunsen. Marcia Pointon calculates that the meeting took place in 1825<sup>340</sup> but this is difficult to substantiate because William’s diaries of that period have gone missing. Bunsen, a

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<sup>334</sup> D. P. XXVIII, Dyce to Jane Brand, 6 Nov. 1849. Dyce quoting scripture: Proverbs 3:6.

<sup>335</sup> Sir Charles Eastlake was an English painter, gallery director and art scholar.

<sup>336</sup> Sir Alexander James Beresford Hope was a British author and Conservative politician.

<sup>337</sup> D. P. I

<sup>338</sup> William Bell Scott, *Memoir of David Scott, R.S.A.* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1850), 195.

<sup>339</sup> Christian Charles Josias Bunsen was a German diplomat and scholar.

<sup>340</sup> Pointon, Dyce, 8.

Prussian, had interests that attracted William. These included liturgical practice, early church music and theology and it would be these spheres of interest that would shape the future vocation of William's life. It is believed that Bunsen also indirectly had an influence on William Dyce's art because he introduced the Scot to Overbeck and the community of the Nazarenes, a community living an ascetic and artistic life in the Monastery of S. Isidoro.<sup>341</sup>

There is some uncertainty when Dyce first met the Nazarenes, whether it was during William's first visit to Rome or on one of his subsequent trips. It is impossible to establish one way or the other because of the papers that went astray and also because there are no paintings from the period from which we could draw inferences of stylistic influence. What we are left with is piecing together the pieces of a jigsaw.

Stirling Dyce, William's son, claimed that his father began to view art as a conveyor of moral and religious meaning independently of any external influence, including that of the Nazarene community. William's son asserts that the Nazarene community were drawn to his father rather than the other way round; he substantiates this by recounting a well known story of a *Madonna* painted by Dyce in 1828 which attracted the Germans then living in Rome in crowds to his studio, as Overbeck writes: This painting was supposed to be the origin of William's reputation in Germany for it is said that when the young Scot returned home, the Germans in Rome, assuming poverty was the reason for a sudden departure, subscribed in order to buy the painting.<sup>342</sup> Of course Stirling

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<sup>341</sup> Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case is a Franciscan church, which is dedicated to St Isidore. Spanish Franciscans founded the church in 1622. The friars dispersed during the Napoleonic occupation. It remained empty until the Nazarene painters settled there.

<sup>342</sup> Margaret Howitt, *Fredrick Overbeck* (1886), cited in Pointon.

Dyce was trying to extol his father's unique contribution to the artistic world but his claim does not seem to stand up. James Dafforne states in the *Art Journal* in 1860 that the Nazarenes never purchased the painting. However, it seems improbable that William met the Nazarenes for the first time only in 1828 through mutual friends; it is more likely that both, over a period of time, benefited from each other's artistic involvement.

William Dyce received his first commission in 1823, for a portrait of Sir James M'Grigor<sup>343</sup>, which was paid for by the students of Marischal College. The large canvas was to hang in the College and depicts Sir James adorned in his grand robes peering over the students. He was to become Rector of Marischal College in 1826. Writing to Geddes about the portrait, the jubilant Dyce exclaimed, 'I called a meeting of the Gentlemen who are subscribers to it, and all approve of it highly.'<sup>344</sup> This early enthusiasm was to lead Dyce initially to the Royal Academy in London and then on to the British Academy in Rome.

It was in Rome that William deepened his early artistic talent. Pointon tells us that the main influence upon Dyce in 1825 was Classical Art and in particular the works of Titian, Poussin and Rubens<sup>345</sup>. After William's return from Italy he exhibited two works at the Royal Academy in 1827, *The Infant Hercules* and *Bacchus Nursed by the Nymphs of Nysa* [Pl. 87], which both strongly indicate the Scot's interest in Classical Art. This initial success and interest seems to have died down by 1829 and

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<sup>343</sup> James M'Grigor (1778-1851) was a military surgeon and director-general of the Army Medical Department who was elected lord rector of Marischal College three times.

<sup>344</sup> W. Dyce to A. Geddes, 26 Sept. 1823, MS. Edinburgh University Library, La. IV, 17.

<sup>345</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 8.

Pointon tells us that William, now once again living in Aberdeen, 'lacked any direction and only painted a few Madonnas.'<sup>346</sup>

During this time in Aberdeen it was said that William could have taken up any number of vocations, including scientist, portrait painter or classical archaeologist. We do, however, witness during this period Dyce taking a keen interest in landscape painting with *Westburn* [Pl. 88], *Fisher Folk* (1830) and *Shirrapburn Loch* (1832). *Westburn* (1827) is organised around scenes of darkness and light: the dark, strongly textured foreground gives way to light open areas; in the foreground there are numerous lobster crates strewn on the floor. What is remarkable about the canvas is the dramatic lighting, which appears from the top right-hand corner through broken clouds, that then reflects on patches of water. The painting suggests the influence of early works of Turner. *Shirrapburn Loch* was completed around 1832 and portrays the isolation of a place where a single heron fishes undisturbed by humanity. The use of a landscape to provide a quality of silence that could never exist in reality is something that Dyce becomes a master of in later years when he paints *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] and *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 95]. In all three landscapes we witness an artistic genre that is more akin to eighteenth century landscape art than the works of Turner. In all three works the emphasis Dyce conveys is an insistence on a universe in which all things have their rightful place and that requires deep religious reverence.

It may be that William Dyce took time off to retreat from what now was a growing demand on him and his painting in Edinburgh. A place that William certainly visited was Rosslyn Chapel, a place full of Scottish baronial and ecclesiastical history. The architectural excellence

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 15.

of the chapel also has an air of mystery; a mystery that is reinforced by the story of the apprentice whose work far excelled the work of his master and was murdered for his talent. In later times the Chapel has been brought to life by the works of Scott and Wordsworth and more recently Dan Brown<sup>347</sup>. However, when Dyce visited the Chapel, possibly in 1832, the crowds that now engulf the place were not there and the Chapel was a place of solitude and silence. In a sabbatical moment Dyce sat before the south door<sup>348</sup> and produced a fine painting which now hangs in the National Gallery of Scotland. The painting is not an architectural study but a play of sunlight that floods through a loosely hung door, illuminating the sandstone interior. A Bible and a rosary sit in the shadow in the foreground of the painting; an air of an other worldly presence evokes a sense of mystery. Certainly, Dyce as a committed High Churchman would have felt comfortable within these ecclesiastical surroundings and both the Bible and rosary may have been his.

Between 1832 and 1837 William Dyce knew both success and failure as an artist. During this period he was the most sought-after portrait painter in Edinburgh. Stirling Dyce states that his father could earn fifteen guineas for a portrait. However, this was only a fraction of the amount that the records show us that William was charging some of his more distinguished clients; a letter from Dyce to Davidson in 1835 states that he had charged Captain Gordon one hundred and thirty guineas for a portrait<sup>349</sup>. William was particularly in demand for child portraits. The number of completed commissions includes: *Dora Louisa Grant* [Pl.

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<sup>347</sup> Sir Walter Scott (1171 – 1832) wrote in his poem *Rosabelle* about the legend that the chapel appeared to be ablaze when St Clair died. In 1831, William Wordsworth wrote the sonnet *Composed in Rosslyn Chapel During a Storm*.

<sup>348</sup> Rosslyn Chapel was in a state of decrepitude until the visit of Queen Victoria in 1842. In the subsequent restoration work an entrance at the west of the building was opened up and a baptistery added.

<sup>349</sup> D.P. II, W. Dyce to P. Davidson, 5 Nov. 1835.

90], aged six, *John, Tenth Earl Lindsay* and *Miss Anne Webster* [Pl. 89]. Dyce acknowledged that he had access to aristocratic circles; he remarked to Denham, 'I now have the reputation for painting children best and ...could easily obtain permission to paint as many buds as may be required'<sup>350</sup> – 'buds' were children of noble birth.

However, not everything went quite so smoothly for him as a portrait painter. In 1834 William agreed to paint the portrait of his uncle Alexander Chalmers. On the 29 May William made the first sketch and took it away to complete in his studio. However, Alexander Chalmers never received the portrait and he recorded in his diary: 'Dyce's behaviour is most shameful, but I shall have nothing to do with him'<sup>351</sup>. It may be that Dyce found the portrait of inferior quality and was therefore reluctant to show it to his uncle.

In 1832 Dyce returns from a mini-grand tour of Europe where the evidence suggests that he made sketches and painted watercolours. One painting from this tour, *Part of the Arsenal, Venice (1832)*, was developed into a finished article and exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1833. Amongst the constant pressures of portrait commissions and the odd landscape painting one gets the feeling that William Dyce's heart is really somewhere else. This is captured in a letter that William receives from the future Cardinal Wiseman in 1834,

When portrait painting and scene painting or what is very akin to it form the surest careers to success for a young artist, to see one who dares to admire and longs to imitate the old, symbolic, Christian manner of the ancients is refreshing indeed to the mind; it is like listening to a strain of Palestrina after a

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<sup>350</sup> National Library of Scotland, Acc. 3044, Dyce to Denham, 16 March 1837.

<sup>351</sup> Alexander Chalmers, In Memoriam Alexander Chalmers 1759-1834, cited in Pointon.

boisterous modern finale. I do not know whether the wish to paint your symbolic designs for the Blessed Virgin excludes every other place but Rome for its fulfilment. Here it would be difficult not to say impossible to procure such a commission; but you have the courage enough to make the first step in a new and beautiful track, before the eyes of your own countrymen, and raise a new style and new school in England....<sup>352</sup>.

The new and beautiful track for William was to engage in a substantial way with religious art and to make connections with medieval church history.

Dyce exhibited *Christ Crowned with Thorns* in Edinburgh in 1830 but there is no longer pictorial evidence of the canvas. We therefore move to *Lamentation Over The Dead Christ* [Pl. 91] which was completed in 1835 and represents William's earliest observable piece of religious art dealing with Christian subjects placed in a naturalistically treated landscape. The *Lamentation Over The Dead Christ* comprises four figures grouped together: St John, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and the dead Christ; each person is draped in voluminous draperies reminiscent of Raphael. Both St John and the Virgin have their heads bowed low in sorrow anticipating the figure of the apostle in *St John Leading the Blessed Virgin from the Tomb*, (1844) [Pl. 92]. In the background Dyce has tried to capture what he imagined the Middle East to look like although he had not travelled to the region. In the far distance stands the Jewish Temple and just in front are three crosses denoting Calvary. Dotted along the horizon are palm trees and mountains giving the impression of a biblical scene. Unusually, however, there are two

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<sup>352</sup> D.P. I. N. Wiseman to Dyce, 1 Sept. 1834.



large trees with trunks and foliage that are more indicative of Scotland than Jerusalem.

Pointon informs us that on his return from Italy Dyce painted several versions of the Madonna and Child but was unable to sell them.<sup>353</sup> The *Madonna and Child* that William exhibits at the Royal Academy in 1838 [Pl. 93] depicts Mary holding the infant Jesus in a close embrace. The Virgin's back is curved, almost seductive, and bare; her eyes are peering downwards and only just open. Mary's hair is tied back but wisps escaping down her neck. The background captures, once again, a Middle Eastern feel. In another Madonna and Child, painted around the same period, we have Mary holding the child but this time the scenery behind is bare and rocky, more akin to Dyce's Scotland. Dyce, at this time, was obviously experimenting with his subjects and their settings, something that would come to fruition in his later work, but he must have felt a conflict in priorities between painting to express faith and the need to paint to eat.

It was William Gladstone that made the comment that Dyce was 'an artist working for his daily bread'<sup>354</sup> and this was the dilemma: on the one hand William was beginning to move among influential people who could live from inherited wealth; the other hand he had to paint in order to live. Gladstone, Prime Minister and leading High Anglican, was a close friend to Dyce and bought a number of his paintings<sup>355</sup> and also introduced him to a number of significant people. These people included Beresford Hope, Thomas Woolner an artist associated with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and many leading Tractarians including Pusey. Dyce shared in these gentlemen's ambitions to educate the wider public in

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<sup>353</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 37.

<sup>354</sup> William Gladstone to Mrs. Gladstone 4 December 1841.

<sup>355</sup> Paintings that Gladstone purchased from Dyce include: *Jessica* and *Beatrice*.

High Anglican faith but in doing so he would fall behind in his paid employment.

Pointon tells us that by the early 1840s Dyce was becoming a leading spokesman on ecclesiological matters and receiving requests for commissions, and acted in an ecclesiastical consultative role<sup>356</sup>. On one occasion Dyce was asked to paint the ceiling of the Taylorian Institute<sup>357</sup> for the University of Oxford. The Oxford authorities allocated £200 for the painting of the Library's ceiling, a sum that was described as 'vile' by Cockerell<sup>358</sup>. As there is no sign that the ceiling has ever been painted, the assumption is that Dyce could not afford the time for this high profile cause. It was, however, as an advisor that William found that he never received adequate recompense, and in effect spent many hours giving *free* advice.

In the autumn of 1839 a number of leading lights of the High Church movement assembled to promote the idea of publishing a series of prints after old masters that would be called 'The Life of Our Lord'. Dyce was asked to give advice on Christian art and his thoughts on the proposed publication. Dyce was determined that the role of the artist was not simply to replicate the art of the past but rather to provide original designs based upon the historical tradition, in order that Christ might speak to a contemporary audience. Here we see Dyce wanting to take moments of divine revelation from the past and apply them with devotional intent to a contemporary audience. Dyce writing to Gladstone states his position:

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<sup>356</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 62.

<sup>357</sup> The Taylorian Institute was established in 1845 following the bequest of Sir Robert Taylor. The Institute and its library are the east wing of the neo-classical building designed by Charles R. Cockerell.

<sup>358</sup> D.P. XXII, C.R. Cockerell to W. Dyce, 12 Nov. 1846. (Cockerell was a member of the School of Design in Edinburgh where William served between 1837 and 1843).

I can assure you that my unwillingness to assist in the mere reproduction of ancient designs is not the result of any foolish vanity but of a true estimate of the vocation of an artist and of the use of art. Both the one and the other belong to their age: and I confess that it seems to me just as unwise to reproduce the models of art of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, with a popular instruction; as it would to preach the sermons of those ages in modern pulpits.<sup>359</sup>

Dyce was becoming increasingly enthusiastic about educating Victorian Britain about the Christian faith and was willing to use a variety of means including words, painting, music and architecture. It seems remarkable that any mention of Dyce's contribution to the design of Trinity College is omitted from the official history of Glenalmond, a school for the sons of Episcopalian clergy. The Perthshire School was very close to the heart of the Gladstone family and, as the following letter from Gladstone to Dyce highlights, the two men shared similar views on the arrangement of the Chapel:

....the building will be of an oblong form without aisles – but with a recess on the north side and near the east end for the organ. If this be so might you not place the clergy within the limit of the chancel, the choir face to face along each side immediately next westward, and the pupils and congregation all facing eastward in transverse benches from each side of the middle aisle? A space would naturally intervene between the chancel and the general mass of seats and that, it seems to me, might advantageously receive the choir. I am much inclined to value highly the concentration of the action of the service at the east end of the chapel as most conducive to unity, solemnity and devotion...<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> D.P. XII, W. Dyce to W. E. Gladstone, 6 Dec. 1843.

<sup>360</sup> D.P. XV, W.E. Gladstone to W. Dyce, 19 April. 1843.

Another field in which Dyce was becoming influential was music and liturgy. In 1843, William, published *The Order of Daily Service*<sup>361</sup> and in doing so returned to Merbecke's communion service to provide a lasting tradition of Anglican liturgical music<sup>362</sup>. Dyce adapted the conventions of Latin plain chant to create a satisfactory vehicle for the chanting of psalms in English.<sup>363</sup> A year later, in 1844, William set the Scottish communion service to music in the hope that Glenalmond's chapel choir at Trinity College would use this; 1844 was a successful one for William Dyce and it was in that year that he started the Motett Society<sup>364</sup>.

In 1840 William, with his industrious friend E. F. Rimbault, also founded the Musical Antiquarian Society whose sole aim was to print and distribute rare pieces of sacred music drawn from both the Catholic and reformed traditions. The society was launched with works by William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons. The Motett Society broadened its aims four years later to promote the appreciation and performance of sacred music as well. Both G. Grove and B. Rainbow<sup>365</sup> seem to be mistaken in their belief that the Motett Society merely reproduced music; the letters from Dyce make it clear that members of the society were to perform music. The Motett Society produced three bodies of music: Anthems, Services for Festivals and Miscellaneous Anthems. William's influence was crucial. In 1848 William was consulted on the value of the manuscript of

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<sup>361</sup> *The Order of Daily Service* was edited in adaptation of the 1662 Prayer Book not as an antiquarian curiosity but as a book for current use [Dyce, in his pagination, *The Order of Daily Service*, Pl. 96]]

<sup>362</sup> John Merbecke, (1510 – 1585) was an English theological writer and musician who produced a standard setting, in plain chant, of the Anglican liturgy.

<sup>363</sup> B. Rainbow, *The Choral Revival in the Anglican Church 1839-72* (London: OUP, 1970), p. 81.

<sup>364</sup> The Motett Society arose out of the Musical Antiquarian Society in the 1840s. The Musical Antiquarian Society aimed at publishing scarce and valuable works by the early English composers.

<sup>365</sup> G. Grove in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1954), 915 and B. Rainbow in *The Choral Revival in the Anglican Church 1839-72* (1970), 65. Both suggest that the Motett Society only published music.

*L'Abbate Santini* that was being offered to the British Museum<sup>366</sup>.

Therefore, even in the area of music, it seems that Dyce's motivation was only first to locate faith from, what he regarded as, a high point in church history but then to allow that moment to speak to a contemporary audience.

Before we progress to consider issues facing painters of religious art in the nineteenth century it is worth pausing for a moment to highlight some of the important points with respect to William Dyce. William had an intense interest in science and the natural world and needs to be regarded as a man of his time when considering the important issues of the day including evolution and the study of fossil records. With regard to his political affiliations his close friendship over many years with liberal minded thinkers such as William Gladstone highlights his progressive tendencies. With respect to religion things are a little more complicated. On the one hand Dyce's own theological development was formed from an historical perspective but on the other hand he had an intense desire to articulate that understanding to a modern audience. It appears that Dyce's personal belief was of a transcendent God who spoke to the world at idealised moments in church history, a tradition of deposited truth in which he now wished to educate his modern audience.

### 3.2 Issues Facing Painters of Religious Art in the Nineteenth Century

It is difficult for today's contemporary scholar to imagine the passion of the debate that surrounded the display of religious art in mid-nineteenth century Victorian Britain. Letters were written to *The Times*

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<sup>366</sup> *L'Abbate Santini* is a library of eighteenth century sacred music.

newspaper, pamphlets were published and well-known spokesmen voiced their concern. It is surprising to note the abusive language directed towards the Pre-Raphaelite paintings and in particular Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* [Pl. 94]. The fury of language directed at Millais causes one to speculate what these writers believed they had detected in this art and what social, political and religious heresies they were trying to stamp out.

One of the more notable attacks on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and in particular Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents*, came from the century's most famous writer Charles Dickens<sup>367</sup>.

You behold the interior of a carpenter's shop. In the foreground of that carpenter's shop is a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy, in a bed-gown, who appears to have received a poke in the hand, from the stick of another boy with whom he has been playing in an adjacent gutter, and to be holding it up for the contemplation of a kneeling woman, so horrible in her ugliness, that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin shop in England. Two almost naked carpenters, master and journeyman, worthy companions of this agreeable female, are working at their trade; a boy, with some small flavour of humanity in him, is entering with a vessel of water; and nobody is paying any attention to a snuffy old woman who seems to have mistaken that shop for the tobacconist's next door, and to be hopelessly waiting at the counter to be served with half an ounce of her favourite mixture. Wherever it is, men as the carpenters might be undressed in any hospital where dirty drunkards, in a high state of varicose veins, are received. Their very toes have walked out of Saint Giles's.....

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<sup>367</sup> Charles Dickens. 'Old Lamps for New Ones.' *Household Words* 12 (15 June 1850), 12-14.

This is a curious onslaught on a group of painters with whom you would have thought Dickens had a common cause – the most famous Victorian writer saluting some of the century’s best painters. At first sight, it would seem that Dickens and the Pre-Raphaelites also had in common concern in the promotion of ultra-realism. However, this was not the case. When Dickens included the savage review in the periodical *Household Words*<sup>368</sup> it should be regarded as both calculated and exceptional. *Household Words* up to that point had never concerned itself with fine art and did not employ an art critic. Therefore, we are left wondering what made Dickens take this unusual step.

The famous writer’s daughter, Kate Perugini, who wrote an article entitled ‘Charles Dickens as a Lover of Art and Artists’, put forward two explanations to account for the vitriol of her father’s attacks on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood<sup>369</sup>. First, Perugini explains that her father’s tastes in painting remained that of a *layman* who does not know anything about art but knows what he likes; ‘My father knew nothing of the technique of painting and could scarcely draw a straight line’. Second, according to the Perugini article, Dickens was short sighted and this limitation in sight was in contrast to the excellent vision of his friend, Maclise. A large part of the article considers the friendship of her father with the painter Maclise. Whilst his close friend and painter, Maclise, gloried in recording details and sharp edges, Dickens, as art critic, preferred the charm of blurred impressions. Maybe the sharp edges of the Pre-Raphaelite’s paintings were too much for his unaccustomed eye. Whilst Kate Perugini’s information about her father’s visual imagination and eyesight

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<sup>368</sup> Dickens, ‘Old Lamps’, 12-14.

<sup>369</sup> Kate Perugini, ‘Charles Dickens as a Lover of Arts and Artists’ *Magazine of Art* 1, (Nov. 1902 – Oct. 1903): 125.

suggest two reasons for her father's dislike of Millais' picture I have to make the case that they do not account for the whole force of Dickens' rage.

In order to understand more fully Dickens' dislike of Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* [Pl. 94] we must consider both the writer's visual imagination and his motivation throughout his writings. We know that the 'Christ' that Dickens portrayed to his children was described as 'pretty'<sup>370</sup> and in some small way represents the saintly children found in one of his novels: little Nell, *Oliver Twist* or Agnes. In general Dickens' represents two quite distinct types of people in his novels: there are the 'good' who simply float through the narrative not quite getting their hands dirty or speaking with 'common' accents, and then there are the others. Contemporary with the exhibition of Millais' painting Dickens published *David Copperfield*. In this semi-autobiographical work Dickens describes in detail Uriah Heep's ginger hair and mottled skin whilst Agnes is simply likened to an angel in a stained glass window. We might be forgiven in thinking that Dickens was hostile to the Pre-Raphaelite venture because he regarded their art as blasphemous. However, Dickens was not a churchman but a social reformer who believed in progress and the contemporary. If there was, for Dickens, a blasphemy in Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* then it was that the figures did not represent 'progression' but rather 'regression' - they did not represent the present but echoed something of the past.

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<sup>370</sup> Charles Dickens. *The Life of Our Lord [Written for his children]*, (London, 1996) accessed on August 2010 on <http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/dickens/etexts/dickens/others/Lord.pdf>.



The clue to Dickens' thinking is in the title 'Old Lamps for New Ones'. This catch phrase embraces all who prefer the old to the new, the past to the present, and retreat from contemporary reality. So when Dickens looked at Millais' painting he saw regression. Dickens used language that sums up the diseased condition that he saw in the figures that Millais depicted – 'repulsive', 'wry-necked', 'horrible in her ugliness' and 'that dislocated throat'; it was that diseased state of mind that denied the present and progress and made reform impossible. This 'great retrogressive principle' that Dickens highlights can be viewed most accurately when looking on Millais' Virgin: 'She is seen as a 'kneeling woman', so horrible in her ugliness, that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England.'<sup>371</sup> An interesting point is that Dickens then links art to other fields of investigation and assumes that Raphael stands in the same relation to painting as Galileo and Newton do to scientific knowledge. Therefore, Fine Arts are subject to exactly the same process of improvement and development in the present of the Victorian age as was science.

When we read an earlier piece of Dickens' work, *Pictures from Italy*, we get a glimpse of what the writer regarded as the source of this retrogressive principle when he writes: 'Every fourth or fifth man in the streets is a Priest or a Monk; and there is pretty sure to be at least one itinerant ecclesiastic inside or outside every hackney carriage on the neighbouring roads. I have no knowledge, elsewhere, of more repulsive countenances than are to be found among these gentry. If Nature's hand-

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<sup>371</sup> Dickens, 'Old Lamps', 12-14.

writing be at all legible, greater varieties of sloth, deceit and intellectual torpor, could hardly be observed among any class of men in the world;<sup>372</sup> and, 'When I observe heads inferior to the subject, in pictures of merit, in Italian galleries, I do not attach that reproach to the Painter, for I have suspicion that these great men, who were, of necessity, very much in the hands of monks and priests, painted monks and priests a great deal too often. I frequently see, in pictures of real power, heads quite below the story and the painter: and I invariably observe that those heads are of the convent stamp, and have their counterparts among the convent inmates of this hour; so, I have settled with myself that, in such cases, the lameness was not with the painter, but with the vanity and ignorance of certain of his employers, who would be apostles – on canvas, at all events.'<sup>373</sup>

Therefore, for Dickens retrogression as externalised in ugliness and deformity came from the Catholic and especially from the monastic way of life. The monastery stamps the bodies of its followers with a deformity that the painter invariably copies. Consequently when Dickens saw Millais' painting, did he regard the 'kneeling woman horrible in her ugliness' as a product of the convent or was it that he thought the painter was so influenced by the Roman Church that he merely preferred ugliness? In any case, what may be observed is that behind Dickens' attack is a loathing of regression that the writer regarded as at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church: a Church that, in his view, wished to take people to an idealised past or another sacred world but did not wish to deal with the reality of the present world.

Dickens may have been the most prominent antagonist with regard to Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* [Pl. 94] but these attacks

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<sup>372</sup> Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1846), 352, accessed on September 2010 on <http://www.archive.org/stream/picturesfromital00dickrich>

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

were more widespread and captured the public imagination. Such attacks insisted that the deformity of the figures was associated with medieval art and especially that of the early 'German' school. *The Times* announced on 9 May 1850, , 'Mr. Millais and his imitators, who are attempting to graft themselves on the wildest and most uncouth productions of the early German school with a marked affection of indifference to everything we are accustomed to seek and admire. Mr. Millais' principal picture is, to speak plainly, revolting. The attempt to associate the Holy Family with the meanest details of a carpenter's shop, with no conceivable omission of misery, of dirt, and even disease, all finished with the same loathsome minuteness, is disgusting; and with a surprising power of imitation this picture serves to show how far a mere imitation may fall short by dryness and conceit of all dignity and truth.'<sup>374</sup>

We, therefore, come to the crux of the problem when looking through the eyes of the art critic, the journalist and public opinion and it must be said that we must allow ourselves to enter the world of mid-Victorian thought. The most dominant themes of Britain in the mid 1850s were progress and issues of contemporary society, and these were most closely associated with nationalism and the Protestant faith. Consequently, a piece of art or an artistic movement that emphasised the 'deformity' that was evident in medieval, pre-Reformation art was linked with regression, an idealised past and the Roman Catholic Church. With respect to art there was a problem that faced Protestant thinking, which muddled the waters, and that was that the hallowed names of Raphael and Michelangelo painted under the patronage of the Roman Church; and despite Protestant Britain's boasted enlightenment, scientific inventions

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<sup>374</sup> *The Times*, Thursday 9 May 1850, 5, accessed on September 2010 on <http://thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/>.

and exploration she was not able to produce a Raphael of her own. To get around this the Protestant faith emphasised that it was not hostile to all art and stressed that the best works, the Raphael cartoons and the Sistine ceiling, were not essentially Roman but were universal<sup>375</sup>.

Looking through the lens of history it is easy to imagine that these disagreements with regards to art, politics and society were mere fallings-out between gentlemen but they rarely were; they were often articulated with fevered emotion and went right to the heart of principle and even the soul. Charles Kingsley, the writer of children's stories, art lover, botanist, social reformer and Protestant clergyman opened his heart when he wrote:

For I am thoroughly anti-pre-Raphaelite benighted pagan heathen in taste, and intend some day to get up a Cinque-Cento club, for the abolition of Gothic art, ....I do not care for grace in man, woman, or animal, which is obtained (as in the old German painters) at the expense of honest flesh and blood. It may be all very pure, and unearthly, and saintly, and what not: but it is not healthy; and, therefore, it is not really High Art, let it call itself such as much as it likes. The highest art must be that in which the outward is the most perfect symbol of the inward; and, therefore, a healthy soul can be only expressed by a healthy body; and starved limbs and a hydrocephalus forehead must be either taken as incorrect symbols of spiritual excellence, or as symbols for certain spiritual diseases which were in the Middle Age considered as ecclesiastical graces and virtues<sup>376</sup>.

Art, therefore, invoked a passionate response and minor details, such as a dislocated throat, could provide the breeding ground for fervent debate. One issue, above all, seemed to divide people and that was the subject of 'naturalism'. At first sight, to our contemporary eyes,

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<sup>375</sup> *The Art Journal*, 1 May, 1850

<sup>376</sup> Kingsley, 'My Winter Garden', *Fraser's Magazine*, (January 1858): 35.

‘naturalism’, with its present day overtones of the rural – Constable’s England - seems fairly innocuous. Returning, however, to Dickens’ *Pictures from Italy*, in this essay the word ‘natural’ is used to express a kind of ideal as opposed to the abnormal. The natural is what is true, which excludes the ugly, the deformed or the diseased. Therefore, when the ideal of naturalism was attacked, the values of progress and science, modernity and national pride were all derided. Why look back to the Medieval Catholic when British Protestantism ruled the waves?

If art invoked a passionate response in the Victorian viewer and commentator the next logical step is to consider the artist and their motivation when they came to paint. Some artists may have accidentally produced paintings that stirred up debate but we must also assume that many artists through their paintings were trying to make religious, political and social statements that underlined the party line they followed. Within this party divide both Catholic and Protestant artists whipped up religious controversy. When compared with our contemporary context the nineteenth century appears to be alien; people then appear to be constantly examining their own and other people’s consciences, in developing arguments for and against Rome, with the Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism on opposing sides. The rise and fall of acceptable belief seemed to depend on attraction or repulsion towards Protestantism or Rome or whether the Thirty Nine Articles could be accepted. I shall now offer examples of how art was used to propagate the Protestant and Catholic views of faith.

Artists from the Protestant tradition were less interested in the devotional and symbolic; rather they presented a piece of British or European history as a dramatic narrative. They wanted to capture and

recapture the stories of the Reformation and they certainly were not interested in artistic styles before the sixteenth century. Many of the nineteenth century Reformation paintings have a domestic setting or stress the presence of a family group – a pious old man with a beard and a beautiful young woman nursing a baby. Sir David Wilkie's drawing *Knox's Administration of the Sacrament in Calder House* presents this homely scene but with the added emphasis of recalling an important moment in Reformation history.

In the painting of *Knox Administration of the Sacrament in Calder House* (unfinished) Wilkie takes an historical event (or myth) and then tells us something about the Reformation's view on the Last Supper.

Wilkie's style is shadowed and naturalistic. There are two cups, a lady to the right of John Knox caresses one – the laity was denied the right, by the Roman Catholic Church, to hold the chalice. The emphasis is placed upon informality, on the homely and the solemn character of the celebration. There is a plain table with a white cloth and a casual assembly of children, matrons, beggars and old men.

Another large composition by Wilkie is that *Knox Preaching before the Lords of Congregation* [Pl. 97]. The setting for the painting is St Andrew's Cathedral, ruined since the Reformation but reconstructed by the artist. It appears that Wilkie spent much of his time travelling to the 'old town' on the east coast of Fife and upon the completion of the picture he tells a friend, 'It had its foundations in history, and Knox that it would be much looked to by the land whence he came, and the Kirk whence he sprung.'<sup>377</sup> The moment captured was an important moment in the Scottish Reformation where Knox, high in his pulpit, renounces the

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<sup>377</sup> Allan Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie*, (London: Murray, 1843), 79.

‘Roman hierarchy’ and the aristocrats who opposed his denunciation of their church. Throughout the nineteenth century many Reformation painters copied and adopted Wilkie’s style and narrative.

An example of paintings from Victorian Roman Catholic art would be canvases produced by John Rogers Herbert. In 1845 Herbert showed an historical reconstruction of *Pope Gregory Teaching the Boys to Sing Chant* [Pl. 97a]. The painting is unapologetically Catholic. As *The Times* comments, ‘His picture of Gregory teaching the boys to sing is another sample of this same class, and is, in its way very clever. The figures are all as flat and stiff as possible, and the mouths of the singing figures, fixed open, have a most extraordinary appearance. Herbert works sedulously and conscientiously in his own path, and though he does choose to consider humanity after it has undergone some pressing process, he should not be denied the praise he deserves. There is something austere and earnest in his Romanism.’<sup>378</sup> Herbert shows his ‘Romanism’ both in style and subject matter.

Herbert’s colour and painting style are pure fifteenth century – at least as the nineteenth century perceived these things. If Herbert really wanted to reconstruct an historical painting he would have been better to paint Gregory in the style of the catacombs or of a Byzantine mosaic; but rather he wanted to capture the essence of a style that was pre-Reformation but only just and then symbolically he wanted to tell us something through his art.

The first thing to note about the work of art is the full title of the painting – *Gregory the Great, Teaching the Roman Boys to Sing the Chant which has Received his Name*. Herbert is trying to illustrate that

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<sup>378</sup> *The Times*, 13 September, 1845.

the piece of art that he has produced has its origins in another form of music and that music was *plainchant*. For Roman Catholics current operatic styles were a bad moral influence; as the Catholic Pugin says, 'A man may be judged by his feelings on Plain Chaunt. If he likes Mozart he is no chancel and screen man. By their music, you shall know them.'<sup>379</sup>

Secondly, the publication *Sacred and Legendary Art*, written by Mrs Anna Jameson, reminds us of the list of achievements accomplished by Pope Gregory, 'He was the first who sent missionaries to preach the Gospel to England.....he instituted the celibacy of the clergy, he reformed the services of the church; defined the model of Roman liturgy, the offices of the priests, the variety and change of the sacerdotal garments.'<sup>380</sup> It was increasingly in these areas of liturgy, dress and priestly office that there was contention in the church; and it was to the ancient forms that Anglo-Catholics also made their appeal.

Thirdly, Gregory's Catholic conversion of Britain was important in the eyes of those who held to the Roman Catholic Church. If the sixteenth century Church under Henry VIII had renounced the authority of the Pope, re-organised liturgy and smashed the monastic institutions, then part of their mission was a re-conversion of the country back to Rome. Gregory was the first Pope to have authority over England and he would, therefore, make an excellent symbol for the journey home.

The examples just illustrated offer a glimpse religious art as seen from the nineteenth century Protestant and Catholic viewpoints. It is important now to turn to the works of Dyce and discover where, if anywhere, his work stood with regard to such discussions. William Dyce

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<sup>379</sup> Brian Fothergill, *Nicholas Wiseman: Catholicism in England*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 131.

<sup>380</sup> Fothergill, *Nicholas Wiseman*, 131.



was neither a Roman Catholic nor a Protestant but a high Episcopalian. With regards to music Dyce admired plainsong but he also supported the works of Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons. In 1841 Dyce founded the Motett Society for the study of Church Music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the early 1850s Dyce interestingly painted a portrait of George Herbert, the seventeenth century poet and amateur musician, composing music for the lute [Pl. 98]. There appears to be considerable divergence in Dyce's artistic interests. On the one hand Dyce admired the Anglican Church of the seventeenth century with her ordered services and religious music. On the other hand, with respect to painting, Dyce extolled the virtues of medieval art and regarded post-Renaissance painters with some disfavour. Therefore, unlike Pugin who looked towards Rome, Dyce regarded the English Church of the seventeenth century as the ideal; '...he was fully aware, that if the Church of England were conducted strictly according to the Canons, and after the fashion proposed and followed at the Reformation, its aspect would be precisely similar to that of the Church of Rome, only divested of all that was superstitious....and the revival of Church Principles and Practices taking place was not as the Romans assumed, the faith and practice of Papal times, but that which had its existence in the Reformed Church of England'<sup>381</sup>.

In all Dyce was an Anglican and held onto the principles of the *via media* and the ideals of the post-Reformation settlement. Therefore, Dyce makes the case with eloquence that, 'the truth is, that most people have

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<sup>381</sup> Dyce Papers, 415 of the MSS biography, Dyce's son is giving a condensed version of the contents of his father's 1841 essay, *On Ecclesiastical Architecture A Defence of Anglican Usage* – Dyce says, 'They (the Catholics) have never practically dared to deny that with us remains the apostolic succession, that ours is the hierarchy that the Church of England,.....is descended, by an unbroken line of succession, from the apostles and founders of the Church Catholic.'

forgotten what the Reformed Church of England was in her prime'. The Church of England was in her prime, Dyce wrote, at the time of Hooker and the seventeenth century divines that followed him: '...if at any time, the Church of England showed her true colours, it was in the age of James I and his son Charles the Martyr....If Hooker, and those who followed in his steps, wrote as the true sons of the Church of England...the very battle which the Church had then to fight against the Puritans and Presbyterians, was in the cause of the Ecclesiastical hierarchy and of the decorum of the Church in externals.....Was Hooker a hypocrite when he put in his unequalled and admirable plea for the decorum of the Church Service? Did he speak the language of Rome and not that of Catholic England? No, truly. But if in him the Church of England spoke, then let us hear no more of the charge of novelty in those matters of outward decorum of which we desire the Restoration; for the struggle now commencing is identical with that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though our opponents be different.'<sup>382</sup>

### 3.3 Omnia Vanitas - *A Magdalene*

On 10 February 1848 William Dyce was elected a member of the Royal Academy; the diploma work submitted by the artist was *Omnia Vanitas* [Pl. 102a]. This piece of art may have done a lot for Dyce's social standing but the critics were less sanguine about it. The Athenaeum records, 'Mr. Dyce's picture this year is less demonstrative than is usual with his works of study at the highest sources. *Omnia Vanitas* refers rather to the schools on this side of the Apennines than to the Florentine or Umbrian masters. His Magdalene forms are less correct in their

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<sup>382</sup> DP, *On Ecclesiastical Architecture, A Defence of Anglican Usage*, 1841.

proportions than is customary with this erudite artist,<sup>383</sup> Pointon describes the painting as ‘turgid’<sup>384</sup>, as if Dyce had been trying too hard to be serious in order to capture the attention of the establishment and in doing so removed any sense of vitality. However, this piece of work deserves inclusion into this study because it highlights Dyce’s attempt to achieve a level of sophistication.

*Omnia Vanitas* – all is vanity. The painting depicts a lady with her head resting upon her left hand and her eyes gazing out of the picture and into the distance; the eyes, deep and chocolate brown in colour, look up and outwards but possibly not towards heaven. There is almost a sense of resignation on the face, no smile on the lips and the lady’s brown hair sweeps down, revealing her right ear and following the line of her neck onto the shoulders – this is a sensual painting. The erotic temperature is increased by the scarlet dress and undershirt draping over the right arm to reveal the neck; both shoulders and the eye are drawn down towards the left bosom. However, while the lady’s left hand supports her head the right rests on top of a human skull.

The most common symbolic use of the skull is as a representation of death and mortality. The skull in *Omnia Vanitas* could quite simply mean that in the face of our ultimate destiny all pleasures are vanity. On the other hand the skull can represent other things in Christian symbolic art; for example, the skull of Adam is often placed at the foot of the cross. In the fifteenth century Fra Angelico paints the *Crucifixion* with the skull of Adam at the foot of the cross indicating the triumph of Christ over death [Pl. 99]. Dyce, familiar with medieval art, would have known the

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<sup>383</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 1848.

<sup>384</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 108.

works of Fra Angelico but he would also have been acquainted with the ideals of the anchorite. In art, St Jerome for example, is often depicted as a half-clad anchorite with a skull [Pl. 100]. An anchorite denotes someone who withdraws from society and leads an intensely prayer-orientated, ascetic life. The anchoritic life became widespread during the middle ages<sup>385</sup> and would have been well known to Dyce.

Pointon seems to be right when she insists that Dyce was 'attempting in this picture to achieve a degree of sophistication which would appeal to a cosmopolitan connoisseur' but, I would argue, she may have been a little simplistic in unpacking that claim. Inscribed on the frame of the painting was the title *A Magdalene* with the 'M' engraved as a capital. Pointon makes the case that Dyce was more concerned with the contemporary fallen woman than with the penitent Mary. Prostitutes in mid-Victorian England were often known as magdalenes and it is to that fact that Pointon is referring. However, the prostitutes' title needs bringing back to its source in Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene has often been identified as a repentant prostitute who turned from her old life of sin to a life of abstinence and devotion and that is the symbolism of the painting. Here we have a woman, possibly a prostitute or even Mary Magdalene herself, in a moment of contemplation; her deliberation is between a life that satisfies the flesh or to be a repentant and move towards the life of the anchorite. In the title *Omnia Vanitas* it seems that Dyce is trying to pre-empt her decision.

The idea of a solitary lady poised in a moment of contemplation was a common theme in mid-Victorian art. In 1851 John Everett Millais

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<sup>385</sup> One very well known medieval anchoress is Julian of Norwich whose writings have left a lasting impression on Christian Spirituality. All Saint's Church in King's Lynn, Norfolk, still has its original 12<sup>th</sup> century Anchorhold.

painted *Mariana*<sup>386</sup> [Pl. 12]. When the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy it was accompanied by a quotation from Tennyson's poem<sup>387</sup> of the same name; the character of Mariana in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* inspired the poem. Rejected by her fiancé, Angelo, after her dowry had been lost in a shipwreck, Mariana leads a lonely existence in a moated grange. Mariana was therefore, through no wish of her own, compelled into a life of seclusion. Millais' *Mariana* has turned, in her loss, to the comforts of the Catholic religion. The setting, almost medieval, is a room with a stained glass window of Gothic design depicting an Annunciation, and a heraldic snowdrop<sup>388</sup> with the evocative motto, *In Coelo Quies*<sup>389</sup>. In the further recesses of her room we can discern a small private altar with its silver hanging lamp, portable triptych and sacred vessels. Mariana has been working at some embroidery and pauses to stretch her back. Her longing for Angelo is suggested by her pose and the needle thrust fiercely into her embroidery. Mariana is consumed by an as yet unsubdued longing after the world and the flesh.

It might be expected that *Mariana* was dismissed as an antiquarian gem but this was not how the Royal Academy reviewers of Victorian Britain saw the painting. Those who reviewed the 1851 exhibition saw medieval religious piety, Gothicism, ritual vessels, painted glass, bright flat colour. One of these reviews came from the satirical magazine *Punch*<sup>390</sup>, which dismissed *Mariana* as medievalism in a couple of woodcuts. The *Punch* cartoon seized upon physical defects in the Millais

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<sup>386</sup> Millais copied the scene from the window of the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford. However, the heraldic design seems to be his own invention.

<sup>387</sup> Tennyson's *Mariana* (1830) – the lines that accompanied the painting:

*She said, 'My life is dreary,  
He commeth not,' she said;  
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,  
I would that I were dead.*

<sup>388</sup> The snowdrop symbolises 'consolation'.

<sup>389</sup> Rest in heaven

<sup>390</sup> *Punch*, 1851, 219.

painting: the emaciated, meagre, spindly body and the extension of the limp body of Mariana into the likeness of a stained glass saint. The *Punch* article had two pieces of art in its sights; the other was Charles Collins *Convent Thoughts*<sup>391</sup> [Pl. 101].

*Convent Thoughts* portrays a nun holding an illuminated missal in her left hand while contemplating a passion flower that she holds in her right hand. The nun is standing in a garden with a profusion of minutely detailed flowers. The nun's seclusion and exclusion are reinforced by the high brick wall that runs parallel to the picture plane, which removes any view of the world beyond. The catalogue that accompanied the painting contained a quotation from Shakespeare<sup>392</sup> that sealed the nun's fate with the obvious approval of Collins. This endorsement of the painter enraged the *Punch* critic who wrote, 'Whether by the passion-flower he has put into her hand he meant to symbolize the passion with which MESSRS. LACEY DRUMMOND and SPOONER are inspired against the conventual life, or the passion the young lady is in with herself, at having shut up a heart and life capable of love and charity, and good works, and wifely and motherly affections and duties, within that brick wall at her back – whether the flower regarded and the book turned aside from, are meant to imply that the life of nature is better study than the legend of a saint, and that, therefore, the nun makes a mistake when she shuts herself up in her cloister, we are not sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Collins' ways of thinking to say.'<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Charles Collins exhibited *Convent Thoughts* at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1851. The missal shows both the Annunciation and the Crucifixion. The costume of the nun demonstrates she is a novice possibly meditating upon her final vows. The flowers were painted in the Oxford garden of Thomas Combe. Collins was never formally a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but he was in sympathy with their aims.

<sup>392</sup> *Thrice blessed that they master so their blood,  
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage.*

<sup>393</sup> *Punch*, 1851, 219.

Ruskin's subdued apology for Millais' *Mariana* [Pl. 12] and Collins' *Convent Thoughts* [Pl. 101] is interesting. Writing to the editor of *The Times* on the 13 and 30 May 1850 Ruskin supports the artists on the grounds of the 'labour bestowed' on the works, the youthfulness of the artists and the attention to detail of the art. However, lurking in the crevices of this defence we see the lines drawn by this most eminent of Victorian art critics. 'Let me state,' he explained on 13 May, 'in the first place, that I have no acquaintance with any of these artists, and very imperfect sympathy with them. No one who has met with any of my writings will suspect me of desiring to encourage them in their Romanist and Tractarian tendencies. I am glad to see that Mr. Millais' lady in blue is heartily tired of her painted window and idolatrous toilet-table; and I have no particular respect for Mr. Collins' lady in white, because her sympathies are limited to a dead wall, or divided between some gold fish and a tadpole.'

In his second letter Ruskin continued to question the content of the two paintings. 'I had, indeed, something to urge respecting what I supposed to be the Romanising tendencies of the painters; but I have received a letter assuring me that I was wrong in attributing to them anything of the kind; whereupon, all I can say is that, instead of the pilgrimage of Mr. Collins' maiden over a plank and round a fish pond, that old pilgrimage of Christiana and her children towards the place where they should 'look the fountain of mercy in the face' would have been more to the purpose in these times.' Ruskin, therefore, confronted with a nun demands an illustration from Bunyan; in any case the art critic

had understood Collins' painting correctly<sup>394</sup>. He had understood that Collins was advocating a religious ideal that was both intolerable and unsuitable to the present age. On the other hand, Ruskin as a Protestant and Calvinist writer suggests an alternative: Christiana. Christiana was a married woman, with many children and had not renounced those things that were of her nature for religious celibacy.

*The Times* editor's response was uncompromising: the painters may have won the affections of Ruskin but the writer of the column would not be hoodwinked, 'The P.R.B. ...combine a repulsive precision of ugly shapes with monotony of tone in such works as *Convent Thoughts* or distorted expression as in *Mariana*'. What was the reason behind both the guarded defence of Ruskin and the outright vitriol of *The Times*? As has already been suggested, it was the content, or at least to what the content of the paintings refers. The content implicitly, and sometimes very explicitly, points towards a historic Catholic religious idealism and away from a contemporary Protestant progressive pragmatism. In each of the three paintings that have been considered – by Dyce, Millais, Collins – we have a woman caught at a moment of contemplation. In Collins' nun we have a woman who has turned her back on the natural desires of the world for a life of celibate contemplation; with regards to Mariana in Millais' work we have the resignation of a lady to a life of Catholic ritual due to forced circumstances, and in the painting by Dyce there is a Magdalene who is making a decision between her earthly passions and the call of the penitent.

Pointon makes the case that in exhibiting *Omnia Vanitas* [Pl. 102a] Dyce was attempting to attain 'recognition from the establishment' and to

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<sup>394</sup> John Bunyan: The Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* presents the pilgrimage of Christian's wife, Christiana; their sons; and the maiden, Mercy.



‘achieve a degree of sophistication’<sup>395</sup>. The Magdalene in the painting is beautifully proportioned and without any of the obvious religious artefacts that litter both *Mariana* [Pl. 12] and *Convent Thoughts* [Pl. 101]; in both circumstances this would have made the exhibit more immediately appealing to the establishment. However, there are hints, even in this early painting, of the things that would be central to the mission of the Pre-Raphaelites – striking colour and attention to detail. The gown that is draped over the lady’s right shoulder is an intense scarlet that, within the tonal range, dominates the painting, and the skull and rock in the foreground show attention to the smallest details.

There is the initial level of sophistication with which the audience would have immediately identified; of a lady painted with great love and beauty but who nevertheless is a *fallen* woman. However, there needs to be recognition of the deep religious meaning within this work of art. Here we have a *Magdalene* who needs to make a decision: will she be a saint or a sinner – will she live a life of a penitent or will she continue in her previous profession? We can almost hear the sermon being preached at the figure on whom we are bending our attention: in the light of all our earthly desires and lusts – *all is vanity!* It has often been assumed that Dyce was ‘direct’ in the meaning of his art but, especially in these later works, there are levels of ambiguity and allegory that need to be considered.

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<sup>395</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 106-107.

### 3.4 The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel

*The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* was painted by William Dyce between 1850 and 1853 and is often regarded as one of his finest works<sup>396</sup> [Pl. 102]. The first version of the Old Testament biblical scene was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850, and immediately drew high acclaim; *The Art Journal* affirmed, 'We cannot too highly praise this work; it is a masterly production, in all respects honourable to the British School of Art'<sup>397</sup>. Dyce painted a number of versions of *Jacob and Rachel*; each was very popular and he could have sold each adaptation a number of times. Sir Charles Eastlake, on 29 April 1853, wrote to Dyce on behalf of Prince Albert to ask, 'whether your charming picture of Jacob and Rachel is disposed of and if not what is its price'<sup>398</sup>. His friend William Gladstone also made an approach to purchase the painting for which Dyce requested a payment of 'two hundred guineas'<sup>399</sup>. However, there is no evidence that either Gladstone or Prince Albert were successful in getting a copy.<sup>400</sup>

*The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* illustrates the biblical text found in the book of *Genesis*, 'Then Jacob kissed Rachel and she began to weep aloud'<sup>401</sup>. The moment captured is when Jacob meets Rachel, who was

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<sup>396</sup> The obituaries of 1864 point to the fact that *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* was regarded as one of Dyce's most significant pieces: *Journal of the Society of Arts* (26 February, 1864) and *The Athenaeum* (20 February, 1864).

<sup>397</sup> *The Art Journal*, (London: June, 1850, June): 165-167.

<sup>398</sup> Eastlake to W. Dyce, 29 April 1853, Dyce Papers XXXIII. Pointon makes the case that *Jacob and Rachel* was 'received with great enthusiasm and William could have sold each version several times over', Pointon, *Dyce*, 120.

<sup>399</sup> W. Dyce to W.E. Gladstone, 6 August 1853, Dyce Papers XXXIII.

<sup>400</sup> The 1850 version of *Jacob and Rachel* was last seen in public at the 1857 *Art Treasures Exhibition* and it was believed to have been sold by Christies in 1893. In 2009 the 'lost' masterpiece was rediscovered in Norway (*The Times*, 6 July 2009). The 1853 version of *Jacob and Rachel* is now in the Kuntshalle, Hamburg.

<sup>401</sup> Genesis 29:11

described as 'lovely in form and beautiful'<sup>402</sup>, whilst she is standing at the well with her father's flocks. The moment is not the actual kiss but just before, with Jacob leaning towards Rachel looking longingly into her face with a racing heartbeat. The urgency of his emotion, and her demure acceptance of his love, is poignantly conveyed by the resting of his hand on the nape of her neck and pressing hers onto his chest, while she stands before him without recoiling or resisting, only looking downwards in a gesture of modest acceptance of his adoring attention.

The ferocity of Jacob's movement towards Rachel is illustrated by the anatomical perfection of the taut energy displayed in his limbs. The 1850 version of the painting has a bearded Jacob with locks of hair that flow naturally; the costume he wears is more rough than in later versions and obviously of animal fur. The figures in the 1853 painting are full length whilst in the previous version they are three quarter length. The background of the painting appears to be more general in the 1853 canvas whilst it is more 'biblical' in the 1850 painting<sup>403</sup>. The omission of any background figures increases the intensity conveyed in the two principal figures and the dramatic action is not surpassed in any other of Dyce's works with the possible exception of *Religion: the Vision of Sir Galahad* [Pl. 103].

The alignment of the figures in the foreground became a stylistic feature of many of Dyce's works<sup>404</sup>. The lost work *Pieta, Landscape with the Dead Saviour, the Virgin, St Joseph and St John*<sup>405</sup> comprised of four figures that are placed in the foreground and all on one plane and provides a template for future works like *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102].

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<sup>402</sup> Genesis 29:17

<sup>403</sup> This was argued by Staley in *Romantic Art in Britain, Paintings and Drawings 1760-1860* (Detroit Institute of Arts and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1968), no. 190.

<sup>404</sup> An example would be *The Judgment of Solomon*, 1837.

<sup>405</sup> Sold at Christies to an anonymous buyer on 31 July 1947, lot 110.

This type of composition allowed the Scottish artist to suppress superfluous background figures and concentrate on the main biblical narrative to convey special Christian meaning and truth<sup>406</sup>.

The biblical account points to the personal story of William Dyce's marriage to Jane Brand in January 1850. Rachel's father, Laban was to trick Jacob into working for him for fourteen years without payment, on the understanding that he would eventually be able to marry Rachel, after which he insisted that Jacob should first marry Rachel's elder sister, Leah, before eventually allowing Rachel to be his wife. The subject therefore alludes to the abiding and patient love that Jacob was to show to Rachel, a theme especially meaningful to the Scottish artist who deferred his own marriage for many years perhaps in consequence of the difference in age between himself and his bride to be – when they married Dyce was forty-six and Jane Bickerton Brand was nineteen. Whatever their difference in age Dyce was a devout man who would want to do things right; he delighted in ritual and formal tradition, which he expressed in his art, giving personal expression to those he loved. When discussing the date of their proposed marriage with his fiancée, who wished the ceremony to take place on the anniversary of her christening, Dyce had very special reasons for pleading an alternative date:

But why not the beginning of January? Say the 7<sup>th</sup>, which is an old country festival of pleasing associations – it used to be called Plough Monday, because on that date the country people began the agricultural year, and brought out their ploughs and instruments of husbandry, repaired them, decked them with evergreens, carried them in procession and ended with a feast and a dance.

Pray tell Mrs. Brand this – and say that I would rather the anniversary of your

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<sup>406</sup> Dyce viewed music, architecture, painting and sculpture as 'languages by which expression has been given to the poetry of Christian feelings.' William Dyce, 'On Church Music,' *The Christian Remembrance*, I (1841), 104-112.

Christening were celebrated by your receiving the sacrament for the first time<sup>407</sup>.

It has been suggested that for Dyce *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102] represents both an artistic interpretation of a biblical scene and an emotional response to his own engagement but it also provides a good example of how the Scottish artist makes the connection between Germanic art and the Pre-Raphaelites. Therefore, what comes next will illustrate how Dyce reflects a connection between the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites and thereby, to some degree, transfers the religious sentiment of medievalism into Victorian Britain.

A great enthusiast for the painting was Dyce's friend and Pre-Raphaelite painter Holman Hunt. Pointon states that Dyce commissioned Hunt to make a copy of *Jacob and Rachel*, which to date has never been discovered<sup>408</sup>. However the following year, 1851, Holman Hunt commenced the *Hireling Shepherd*<sup>409</sup> [Pl. 104]. I would like to suggest that Pointon underplays the connection between the two works of art when she suggests that in the *Hireling Shepherd* 'we detect Dyce'<sup>410</sup>; *The Times*' newspaper article is certainly closer to the significance of the connection between the two works of art when it reports: 'Dyce even asked the leading Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt to paint his own version of *Jacob and Rachel* while it was still on display in 1850. Hunt called his *The Hireling Shepherd*<sup>411</sup>.

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<sup>407</sup> Dyce to Miss Jane Brand, Dyce Papers XXVIII

<sup>408</sup> Hunt claims that Dyce paid him £15 for making a copy of *Jacob and Rachel* and that he spent every penny. W.H. Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (Vol. 1)*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905).

<sup>409</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 120.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> *The Times*, 6 July 2009. 'Lost Dyce Masterpiece rediscovered in Norway'.

The title for *The Hireling Shepherd* [Pl. 104], exhibited at the R.A. in 1852, must have been taken from the tenth chapter of the gospel of St John<sup>412</sup>. The painting, however, was accompanied in the catalogue by a quotation from Shakespeare's *King Lear*<sup>413</sup>. It is obvious from the biblical passage that whatever Hunt was trying to achieve it was not providing it with an illustration. In the painting we do not see the shepherd fleeing or the sheep being scattered by wolves. The only sense of relating Hunt's shepherd with the one found in St John is on some common basis of symbolic intention and that is the way in which the painting speaks of false leadership in the church. The symbolic interpretation will be considered in a moment but even with an initial inspection the similarities between the Dyce and Hunt paintings are obvious: both use the arrangement of a man thrusting himself on a woman on a single plane on the foreground of the canvas. The relationship between the two works is explicit but then Hunt does something different – he expands the religious symbolic meaning.

A first, straightforward way of seeing *The Hireling Shepherd* is to consider it on the level of factual realism, a painting of agricultural life. In this interpretation we have a real shepherd and a real shepherdess frolicking in a landscape full of sunlight with all the colours of luscious summer. At its exhibition many art critics certainly interpreted the painting in this straightforward way and unanimously condemned it for its vulgarity, objecting to its portrayal of sexually uninhibited country people. *The Illustrated London News* objected to the 'fiery red skin' and

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<sup>412</sup> John 10: 11-13 'I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hireling is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.'

<sup>413</sup> 'Sleepest or wakest thou jolly shepherd?  
Thy sheep be in the corn.  
And for one blast of thy manikin mouth  
Thy sheep shall take no harm'.

‘wiry hair’ of Hunt’s peasants<sup>414</sup>. *The Athenaeum* was particularly offended by these ‘rustics of the coarsest breed....flushed and rubicund’ from too much cider<sup>415</sup>.

A second interpretation is to consider the symbolic intention of the painting and relate it to both the Gospel reading from which the title was taken and the Shakespearean quotation from the catalogue. The painting could be regarded as a rebuke to the pastoral negligence of the day. The shepherd was ‘the type of muddleheaded pastors, who, instead of performing their services to their flock – which was in constant peril – discuss vain questions of no value to any human soul. My fool has found a Death’s Head Moth<sup>416</sup>, and this fills his little mind with forebodings of evil. And he takes it to an equally sage counsellor for her opinion. She scorns his anxiety from ignorance rather than profundity, but only the more distracts his faithfulness. While she feeds her lamb with sour apples, his sheep have burst bounds and got into the corn.’<sup>417</sup> Hunt himself asserts, in a letter to the Manchester City Art Gallery, that the couple symbolises the pointless theological debates that occupied Christian churchmen while their ‘flock’ went astray due to a lack of moral guidance<sup>418</sup>.

The attribution of Dyce’s work to the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood highlights an important contribution that the Scottish artist makes to the nineteenth century art movement. The subject of *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102] had been handled by various German

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<sup>414</sup> The Illustrated London News, (22 May, 1852), 407.

<sup>415</sup> *The Athenaeum*, (22 May, 1852), 581-583.

<sup>416</sup> The Death Head Moth is associated with evil. The moth is also mentioned as a symbol of death in John Keats’s *Ode to Melancholy*.

<sup>417</sup> John Gere and Robin Ironside, *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, (London: The Phaidon Press, 1948) 28.

<sup>418</sup> [www.manchestergalleries.org](http://www.manchestergalleries.org)

artists of the group known as the Nazarenes, who had gathered in Rome and with whom Dyce had made contact in the mid-1820s. The most important source for these German painters with regards to the subject *Jacob and Rachel* was Palma Vecchio's<sup>419</sup> rendition (1525), which now hangs in the Dresden State Museum [Pl. 105]. Furthermore, Pointon highlights a number of German artists who might have had a direct influence on William Dyce's work. These include a drawing by Schnorr<sup>420</sup> and a series of engravings that were published in the *Art Journal* by Strahuber in 1851<sup>421</sup> [Pl. 106]. Therefore Dyce represents a connection between the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites, and was in some degree instrumental in transmitting the principles of that earlier attempt to return painting to the spiritual intensity of the idealised pre-Renaissance period to British art in the nineteenth century.

It is important, however, to take into account that at each stage in the process of transmission something quite unique was taking place. The German painters were more archaistic in their approach, trying to reflect a different century with little reference to their contemporary setting. Dyce, on the other hand, very much takes into account the present but is never overtly didactic. At his finest, William Dyce's biblical subject paintings, including *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102], exhibit an effective fusion of resolute intellectual directness and consciously committed emotion. The Pre-Raphaelite Holman Hunt was then able to absorb the stylistic qualities of Dyce and re-constitute them into an elaborate show of symbolic exuberance.

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<sup>419</sup> Palma Vecchio (1480-1528) born Jacopo Palma or known as Jacopo Negretti, was an Italian painter of the Venetian school.

<sup>420</sup> Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872) was a German painter born in Leipzig. In 1815 Schnorr followed Overbeck to Rome and joined the Nazarene movement.

<sup>421</sup> Examples of German Artists, *The Art Journal* (London, March 1851): 90.



### 3.5 Frescoes in the Queen's Robing Room - Houses of Parliament

In July 1847 William Dyce received the commission to decorate the Queen's Robing Room with frescoes of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. *Le Morte d'Arthur*<sup>422</sup> is a compilation by Sir Thomas Malory<sup>423</sup> of Romance tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table. The work was first published in 1485 by William Caxton and remains the principal source for Arthurian studies. Many nineteenth century writers and painters have used Malory as their inspiration, including Tennyson<sup>424</sup> and Edward Burne-Jones<sup>425</sup>.

The new Houses of Parliament were nearly complete by the late 1840s and they stood like an ancient gothic cathedral at the centre of a modern world empire. Intertwined with the national mood of self-confidence was a growing nostalgic interest in the visionary kingdom of King Arthur and the Round Table. King Arthur existed within the popular imagination as a high point of English greatness and one that all future generations should aspire to. It was within this atmosphere of national self assurance that Prince Albert sought a series of works that would 'elevate the character and habits of the people'<sup>426</sup>. Many artists tried to capture this national mood by painting scenes from the Arthurian story, including Burne-Jones<sup>427</sup>, Simeon Solomon<sup>428</sup> and Dante Gabriel

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<sup>422</sup> Originally spelled *Le Morte Darthur*, Middle French for 'the death of Arthur'.

<sup>423</sup> Sir Thomas Malory (1405 – 1471) was an English writer, a knight, landowner and Member of Parliament.

<sup>424</sup> Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*.

<sup>425</sup> Edward Burne-Jones, *The Last Sleep of Arthur*.

<sup>426</sup> Sir Theodore Martin, *The Life of H.R.H. the Prince Consort* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1875), 166-7.

<sup>427</sup> A third design by Burne-Jones was completed in 1858. The detailed pen and ink drawing portrays a knight kneeling before his maiden before going into battle [Pl. 110].

<sup>428</sup> Simeon Solomon's Galahad design is strongly Pre-Raphaelite and is closely linked to Malory's. The pen and ink drawing is entitled *The Death of Galahad* and depicts the conclusion of Galahad's life in

Rossetti<sup>429</sup> but it was William Dyce who was chosen to illustrate the Queen's Robing Room.

As William Dyce moved further into the area of literary painting he began to study his sources in detail. After twelve months of reading around the subject of King Arthur in preparation for his commission he declared to Eastlake, 'The more I studied the subject the more I became convinced that Arthur was a real person'<sup>430</sup>. His studies and consultations would continue for a further twelve months until he started work in 1849. During this time of preparation William completed a series of seven water-colour drawings, one for each compartment in the Queen's Robing Room; Pointon tells us that Dyce was painstaking in discovering details of costume and armour<sup>431</sup>.

William Dyce worked on the frescoes in the Queen's Robing Rooms for fifteen years, until his premature death in 1864. It seems that the daunting prospect of fulfilling such a great commission in the later years of his life caused him emotional pain: William spoke to Holman Hunt of the great sadness he felt that he was beginning such a major task with his hair already grey<sup>432</sup>. William had been given a miserly six years to complete seven frescoes and even with an extension of the deadline both the feeling of personal failure and public pressure began to take its toll. Dyce's son states that by 1855 William had begun to use stimulants in order to 'support his sinking energies'<sup>433</sup>. William Dyce died, aged fifty-eight, with five of the seven frescoes completed; each of the frescoes

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the final Grail mass at Sarras. Galahad kneels, crowned king of the Spiritual City, before Joseph of Arimathea who puts a wafer to his lips and kisses his forehead [Pl. 109].

<sup>429</sup> In 1857 Rossetti began his designs for the Oxford Union. The first and the only one completed was *Sir Lancelot's Vision of the Holy Grail* [Pl. 108] and the second was *How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival were fed with the Sanc Grael, but Percival's Sister Died by the Way* [Pl 107].

<sup>430</sup> D.P. XXVII, W. Dyce to Eastlake, 20 July 1848.

<sup>431</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 104.

<sup>432</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 229.

<sup>433</sup> D.P. XVII.

depicts a scene from the Arthurian legend that is intended to exemplify the virtues inscribed beneath them. It is not possible to examine each of the frescoes in detail but a close study of just one, *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and his Company* (1851), can reveal the tension between Dyce's personal Catholic beliefs and the need to paint for a predominantly Protestant audience.

Writing on the subject of religious art Dyce expressed,

Can it be shewn that any writer of eminence in the English Church ever objected to crosses, crucifixes, pictures, etc. as things evil in themselves? On the contrary, do not later divines defend the use of them on the ground that the danger of worshipping them being gone, the things were not only harmless in themselves, but desirable on account of their help to piety and devotion.<sup>434</sup>

To gain an insight into the mind of Dyce the sketch of *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and his Company* (1850) will be compared to the actual fresco in the Queen's Robing Room: the first hides the inner beliefs of the Aberdeen artist; the second presents those beliefs to Protestant viewers. According to Caroline Babington the Arthurian myth that Dyce finally paints is better understood as a kind of proto-Pilgrim's Progress where Galahad becomes like Christian in search of the Celestial City. In the sketch, Galahad is kneeling lost in the mystery of wonder at the miracle that is taking place at the altar, whilst the final painting depicts the knight as a pilgrim. In the original sketch the Grail was on the altar but in the painting it is in the hands of the priest, eliminating any suggestion of the mediating power of Catholic consecration where the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ.

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<sup>434</sup> Caroline Babington, ed., *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006), 38.

The incense censer rests firmly on the ground in the final painting, reducing any sense of ritualistic celebration. Debra Mancoff makes the case that the painting has been reworked for a Protestant audience, where the Grail represents a symbol pointing to, but not holding the Christ<sup>435</sup>.

Therefore, Dyce died in 1864 while still completing his frescoes in the Queens Robing Room. The task had become long, onerous and depressing. However, perhaps the most difficult element that Dyce constantly faced was trying to marry his Catholic beliefs with a nineteenth-century domestic framework, bringing together what Dyce would have regarded as historic truth and the great changes that were taking place in contemporary society. In this given example we see Dyce yearning for the Christ of the Catholic Renaissance in the face of the Protestant progressive inclinations of the nation.

### 3.6 Titian Preparing to make his first essay in colouring

In 1855 John Ruskin attacked William Dyce's Academy exhibit *Christabel* for representing one of 'the false branches of Pre-Raphaelitism'<sup>436</sup> [Pl. 110a]. The reason given for this criticism by Ruskin was that he 'felt that William had merely imitated the forms of the early Italians not their spirit'<sup>437</sup>. This attack appears unwarranted as the painting seems to reflect many of the attributes associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement: the oak tree covered with ivy depicts high attention to detail and there is a medieval atmosphere surrounding the lady featured. Two years later, however, the critic and artist seem to have been reconciled

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<sup>435</sup> Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art*, (London: Garland, 1990), 141

<sup>436</sup> John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, (London: George Allen, 1909), Vol. 19, 78.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid

when Ruskin highlights the painting *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* as the only picture in the exhibition<sup>438</sup> ‘quite up to the high watermark of Pre-Raphaelitism’<sup>439</sup> [Pl. 111]. If the condemnation in 1855 seems a little premature then the praise in 1857 certainly highlights a change in the Scottish artist’s style from *Jacob and Rachel* (1850-1853) [Pl. 102], where the background seems an irrelevance, to the minute detail and colour that now surrounds the main character *Titian*.

The painting consists of the young Titian sitting on a leather backed chair gazing upwards towards a white statue of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus. The young Titian supports his head with his left hand whilst the right hand holds a few of the flowers spread across the ground at his feet; the hand and flowers rest upon an open ‘sketch’ book with a blank page. The mauve leather chair is subdued and blends into the natural background so that Titian stands out with his green tunic, black tights and resplendent yellow shirt. The colouring of the young boy’s face creates an almost artificial feel about the composition that make him look to some extent like a ‘porcelain’ doll. If the figure of Titian looks a little contrived then this contrasts with the background. The garden is blossoming with natural colours painted in minute detail: the bark of the trees looking ancient and craggy, the fresh green leaves that are separated from the grass by woodland undergrowth, and in the foreground a basket of flowers. Around the young Titian there are arrays of objects that point to his future profession: a glass bulb of water, a maulstick and an artist’s hat. The focal point of the painting is divided into two: on the left side is

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<sup>438</sup> ‘The Royal Academy Exhibition of 1857’: [*The Art Journal* (London, April, 1858), 100] certainly regarded Dyce’s *Titian* worthy of praise when it declared that the painting had ‘acknowledged merit’ and ‘stood the test of public criticism’.

<sup>439</sup> John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin* ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, (London: George Allen, 1909), Vol. 14, 98.

the seated Titian and on the right is the statue of Madonna and Child elevated on a tree stump. The white colour of the statue makes it look, like Titian, almost artificial when compared to the background. Mary, dressed in long robes and wearing a crown, is looking down towards the young Jesus. The baby stands upright in her arms, holding the weight of his own head, and in turn seems to be looking downwards in a questioning manner at the seated artist.

Pointon<sup>440</sup> states that the painting *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] was 'loosely' based upon Ridolfi's *Life of Titian* in Volume 1 of *Le meraviglie dell' arte*.<sup>441</sup> In the Royal Academy catalogue Dyce cites Ridolfi as the source for the story that Titian as a child had drawn a Madonna, which he coloured with the juices of flowers. A closer inspection of the *original* writing shows that in fact Ridolfi's account is somewhat different: there is no mention of a drawing and he wrote that Titian engraved his efforts on a stone from a ruined building lying on the street where he lived<sup>442</sup>. Therefore, Dyce's painting of Titian appears to be an illustration predominately of his own making. If Dyce is making a statement in the *Titian* painting on the history of art (and his own position in that movement) then Pointon's description<sup>443</sup> with regard to the meaning of the painting is inadequate and requires further investigation.

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<sup>440</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 145.

<sup>441</sup> Carlo Riolfi (1594-1658) was an Italian art biographer and painter of the Baroque period. He was born near Lonigo near Vicenza and died in Venice. He wrote a biography of the Venetian painters in 1648 titled *Le meraviglie dell' arte overo Le Vite de gl' illustri pittori Veneti, e dello stato Venice* (1648), I, p. 136: 'onde ancor piccioletto col solo impulse della natura fece co'sughi di fiori entro ad uno capitello sopra ad una strada della sua Patria la figura della Vegine, gia non molto tempo, per occasione di certa fabrica rouinato'.

<sup>442</sup> On the other hand there was a legend current in mid-Victorian Britain that Titian painted the *Madonna* with the juice of the flowers [see *The Art Journal*, 30 (London, June 1857), 165]. However, this does not detract from the fact that Dyce was not merely representing a story but also making a statement.

<sup>443</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 145. Pointon argues that if the young Titian painted the white sculpture with the colours of spring then it would reinforce his support for coloured sculpture in churches.

Before this, however, it is important to try and gain some understanding of Dyce's view on the history of art. Dyce's own opinions appear in an unpublished lecture of 1844 entitled *Christian Art*. Although this lecture took place six years before even *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102] was painted it does give some idea of the process of Dyce's intellectual thoughts even if the practical working out took a few years to catch up. In the lecture Dyce divides Christian art into five epochs: (1) Christian-Pagan, lasting to the sixth century, Christian in intention, pagan in form; (2) Barbaric, which included Byzantine, Lombard, Rhenish, Saxon and Norman, lasting until the end of the thirteenth century; (3) Ascetic, the period in which Christian art reached the highest point of excellence, and which ended in Italy in the beginning of the fifteenth century; (4) Pagan-Christian, which superimposed revived pagan forms on a debased condition of Christian sentiment; and lastly, (5) the Sensual – a school named by the Italians, characterised by neglect of the ancient and approved types of sacred persons and things and the substitution of a comparatively vulgar and unspiritual imitation of nature. At its best, Dyce claims, Christian art had taken 'nature for its guide and its model'<sup>444</sup> and it is with this in mind that *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] is considered.

In Titian's right hand, under his palm, there is a spray of flowers that includes an iris; an iris represents the spectrum of colour in the rainbow. The iris would be the kind of Pre-Raphaelite emblem that stresses the importance of colour. The remaining flowers, that are coming

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<sup>444</sup> Lecture dated 24 May 1844 which was found amongst the MSS Dyce Papers in Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum.

out of the basket and spread across the ground, include primroses, camellias, bluebells, tulips, carnations and rosebuds. The painting may display a scene of late spring or early summer but the flowers would have bloomed between early February and June, compressed in one time and place. Dyce therefore may be comparing the spring season with the age of Titian and stating that this is an epoch in the history of art whilst the array of flowers looks forward to the summer that the young artist will surely bring. However, this interpretation has its problems. The adult Titian, for Dyce, is part of the sensualist movement and represents the decline in art and not its spring or summer.

Another way of looking at the painting *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* is to consider the youth gazing up at the beautifully formed statue. The young Titian is looking in an inquisitive way as if this is a moment of perception. The discovery that the young artist makes is the contrast between the uncoloured gothic statue and the array of colours and detail found in nature. In this painting Dyce is not only demonstrating how he regards the future of the current art movement but also how his own style of art will progress. This is a moment when traditional religious art and naturalistic observation of the light and colour found in the open air are brought into direct opposition. If this is a scene of discovery then it is one that favours natural light and colour.

If Dyce received scathing comments with regards his depiction of *Christabel* [Pl. 110a] from Ruskin, then with *Titian* Ruskin was far more complimentary, probably because it was close to Ruskin's own ideals in art<sup>445</sup>. In *Titian* Dyce was making a statement that he was rejecting a

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<sup>445</sup> It must be said that many art critics gave a positive response to Dyce's *Titian* including Dafforne who commented in *The Art Journal* in 1860: *Titian* was a production coveted far beyond any other in the gallery, beautiful in conception, admirable in expression and exquisite in the refinements of its execution; it manifests all the merits of the Pre-Raphaelites without the slightest approach to there defects. J. Dafforne, 'British Artists: Their Style and Character', *The Art Journal* 70 (London: Oct. 1860): 293.



purist ideal for a naturalist one. The year before *Titian* was completed in 1856, Ruskin had published *Modern Painters* (Volume 3), which considers the nature of purist and naturalist ideals. So far as Ruskin was concerned the greatest painter of nature was Turner and in Volume III of *Modern Painters* the art critic states that Titian was a 'teacher' of Turner: 'in the great Venetian school of landscape Turner received much important teaching...and...the designs of the *Liber Studiorum* were founded first on nature, modified by fond imitation of Titian'<sup>446</sup>. By 1859 Ruskin was to declare that, 'indisputably Titian was the greatest painter ...who ever lived'<sup>447</sup>; this was due to the naturalism and truth that he found in Titian's art: 'examine the vine leaves of the *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the National Gallery, examine the borage blossoms, painted petal by petal, though lying loose on the table, in Titian's *Supper at Emmaus* in the Louvre, or the snail shells on the ground of his *Entombment*...finishing...means in art telling more truth'<sup>448</sup>. There could be reason to believe that Dyce followed closely the comments by Ruskin.

William Dyce expressed an interest in painting from nature but he was slow and careful in allowing it to alter his art. Ruskin did praise his *Titian Making His First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] for its sense of form but criticised it as deficient in colouring<sup>449</sup>. Ruskin was quite severe with respect to the complexion of the young Titian: 'no boy could ever have coloured a Madonna's face who had so little colour in his own'<sup>450</sup>. Dyce was an older and more sober artist than the members of the Pre-

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<sup>446</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Vol. 3) (London: George Allen, 1883), 399.

<sup>447</sup> 'The Unity of Art', lecture delivered at Manchester 22 February 1859 [John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin* ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (Vol. 16), (London: George Allen, 1905), 314]

<sup>448</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Vol. 3) (London, George Allen, 1883), 167.

<sup>449</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 14, 98-99.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

Raphaelite Brotherhood and his paintings never steer into the profusion of colour of Holman Hunt and Madox Brown<sup>451</sup>. However, during the 1850s Dyce did follow the example of the Pre-Raphaelites by painting on a white background and increasing the intensity of his greens (though not of his blues and purples).

In *Titian Making His First Essay in Colouring* we observe that Dyce is working within an immanent framework. In that, despite the historical subject, the colours used and the attention to detail point to the fact that Dyce is painting the everyday and the mundane – that is nature as it is directly observed: every leaf is displayed in natural colour and each translucent spine is replicated. It appears that Dyce is involving himself purely within the material world without any reference to the transcendent. The historical figure of Titian is subservient to the overall theme of the painting and is only there to provide a narrative that uses natural colours to replicate nature.

It was with respect to the content that Ruskin was complimentary about Dyce's *Titian* painting; he expressed the conviction that it came up to the standards of Pre-Raphaelitism when he wrote: 'Dyce has chosen a subject involving an amount of toil only endurable by the boundless love and patience which are first among the Pre-Raphaelite characteristics<sup>452</sup>. Therefore, Ruskin was now recognising the quality of Dyce's work and including the Scottish artist as one of the followers of the Pre-Raphaelite movement; a movement whose earlier history had been nourished by Dyce's principles and, as seen in the painting *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102], offering an example for others to follow. In part Ruskin diligently fostered the naturalism that Dyce paints in the last years of the 1850s.

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<sup>451</sup> Ruskin claimed that Dyce's paintings did not exhibit the 'gleams of green and shades of purple' that were found in Hunt's and Brown's pictures. [Ruskin, *Works 14*, 98-99.]

<sup>452</sup> Ruskin, *Works 14*, 98.

This contemporary naturalism would provide a backdrop for Dyce within which to place his own vision of Christ.

### 3.7 Gethsemane

In the painting *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] William Dyce is making a statement about art but in the work *Gethsemane* he is displaying his personal conviction [Pl. 86]. In *Gethsemane* Dyce places the Christ, to whom he is committed, into a Scottish glen, a place that he calls home, and creates an atmosphere that is filled with a pregnant silence. The date of the painting is difficult to ascertain due to the fact that the picture was executed on his own account and was probably given to a close friend or member of the family<sup>453</sup>. Pointon states that the canvas was probably painted between 1857 and 1860<sup>454</sup> and then seems to contradict this by placing 1855<sup>455</sup> on the plate at the back of the book. It would seem more probable that *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] was painted later than *Titian* and grouped with the biblical paintings that Dyce completes towards the end of the decade. Regardless of the precise date of the painting it does seem that *Gethsemane* received high public approval.

In the biblical account<sup>456</sup> of Gethsemane the viewer is left almost too embarrassed to contemplate Jesus as he is abandoned and left to walk this part of his journey alone. Jesus takes with him into the garden three of his most trusted friends - Peter, James, John – but none is able to keep

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<sup>453</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 162. makes this case but if this was the situation then it seems rather strange that the painting should be taken to auction only a few years after Dyce's death.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, plate 92.

<sup>456</sup> Matthew 26: 36 – 46 and Mark 14: 32 -42. 'Gethsemane' probably means 'olive press'. The area identified by the Gospel writers is located as a garden beyond the Kidron ravine (John 18:1-12). It is therefore taken to be on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, some half a mile from the wall of Jerusalem.

awake and at the critical moments each has fallen asleep. Jesus is left isolated crying 'abba, father...take this cup away from me' and each time the answer comes back 'no'. For about the first time in the Gospels we witness the vulnerability of Jesus; up to this point Jesus had always been strong, ready with a reply and full of vision about the kingdom of God. However, now Jesus is like a man in a waking nightmare. The Gethsemane narrative reflects the earlier account of Jesus in the wilderness where he fights a lonely and personal battle with the devil. In his version of *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86], Dyce captures the moment of abandonment; the disciples are not present in the painting and the Christ is left to walk alone. In the canvas the solitary figure of Jesus is walking into the dark shadow of the tree towards the ultimate death only he can face.

William Dyce in his presentation of *Gethsemane* [pl. 86] provides a religious subject painting where the landscape is wonderfully used to reinforce the artist's depiction of Christ. The figure of Jesus is relatively small in comparison to the whole canvas. This does not mean, however, that the figure is an incidental feature in what is otherwise a naturalistic landscape. On the contrary the landscape is there to create the atmosphere in which the figure exists. The Jesus figure is intent, head bowed, blue cloak wrapped around him and ascending the path as if he is walking out of the picture. Dyce did not create a Holy Land with a geographically accurate backdrop to his picture but rather painted his native scenery of Scotland to provide an emotive landscape that would convey his specific religious conviction. However, the depiction of Christ is far from contemporary and it appears that Dyce is taking his reference point from another place, another moment in history - possibly biblical or possibly medieval.

We view the figure of Jesus from a distance with a remoteness that never allows the viewer to disturb the feeling of isolation. The mood is eerily silent; there is no other human or animal figure in the painting and the rock pool in the foreground is still and without movement. The dark lowering hills mix with the rich green foliage of the trees to bear down upon the small and vulnerable figure. This claustrophobic valley of Gethsemane fills the onlooker with a sense of doubt and foreboding. Just behind the figure of Jesus is a long winding path that leads to a half open gate that must be taken literally as a symbol of the difficult path that the Christ must tread. If Jesus chooses to take this path then it leads to the gloomiest and densest of forests. However, above the forest is a bright, almost cloudless sky that holds the promise of the future.

The two main periods in William Dyce's life that required his determination and activity were in the 1830s, when the Scottish artist painted portraits, and his final two decades when he worked on the large series of frescoes in the Houses of Parliament. However, some of the more appealing of Dyce's work can be seen in the landscape pictures that he painted towards the end of the 1850s.

Throughout his life Dyce seems to have been attracted to landscape painting. The numerous landscapes that Dyce exhibited in the early part of his career have either disappeared or are unidentifiable. One painting, however, that hangs in the Aberdeen Art Gallery, may be an example of Dyce's early landscape work: *Coast Scene: Composition*<sup>457</sup>. The painting comprises of a view of Dyce's home in Aberdeen and quite deliberately shows Westburn House, the home of his mother's family [Pl. 88]. The painting is interesting due to the highly ordered nature of the painting and

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<sup>457</sup> *Coast Scene: Composition* was exhibited at the Scottish Academy in 1832.

the overall feeling of being very 'old fashioned'. This traditional aspect of art was certainly part of Dyce's early portrait work despite the journeys he had made to Italy and the attention he was given by the Nazarenes some five years earlier.

Dyce did exhibit landscapes from the trips he made to Italy and other parts of Europe<sup>458</sup>. A number of drawings from Dyce's 1832 trip to Southern France and Venice were part of a sale at Christies in 1865<sup>459</sup>. One of the landscapes was inscribed 'Rhone at Avignon 1832' and is now found in the British Museum [Pl. 112]. The canvas consists of a low horizon with an empty and washy sky. The colour is weak almost monochromatic, with a luminous distance and boldly cast shadows giving the sense of a Mediterranean light that almost destroys colour. The architecture is simple in form and there seems to be no point in the picture that brings the viewer to a position of focus or reaction.

During the period when Dyce was employed by the School of Design (1837-1843) he painted very little but when he emerged from that position in the mid-1840s William becomes a leading figure in the revival of fresco painting centring on the House of Lords. In 1846 Dyce took a trip to Italy to make technical recommendations for the Houses of Parliament<sup>460</sup>. The notes that Dyce kept from his observations, however, are more than technical considerations and provide an understanding of his attitude towards art that will feed into his landscapes of the 1850s. The report shows that he compares the later works of Raphael unfavourably with his earlier ones and he showed little support for the 'turgid and unarchitectonic style of Michelangelo'<sup>461</sup>. In Siena William

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<sup>458</sup> There is a drawing by David Scott, dated 1832, of Dyce sketching in a gondola, which is found in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

<sup>459</sup> Christies, Friday 5 May 1865, Lot No. 117. *The Rhone at Avignon*.

<sup>460</sup> Published as an appendix to the *Sixth Report of the Commissioners on the Fine Arts* (1846).

<sup>461</sup> MMS. Notes of Frescoes in Italy by William Dyce, 820.

Dyce studied the works of three artists – Pacchiarotto, Sodoma and Beccafumi – and attacked them for moving away from the Christian School of the fifteenth century and abandoning it for ‘an unmeaning and vain glorious kind of art, in which the artists became everything, the true representative of his subject nothing’<sup>462</sup>.

On the other hand Dyce is not dismissive of all art after 1500 in these notes. William makes positive comments with regard to the ‘prodigious vigour and force’ of Guercino’s frescoes in Piacenza and he repeatedly expressed his highest admiration for Domenichino<sup>463</sup>. What is interesting to note is that Dyce was studying how Perugino used several different colours to paint flesh, and the way in which Perugino created a diagram of colours passing from reds and yellows to the deep blues and greens that he found in the shadows<sup>464</sup>. Dyce also made comments on the effect of light and compared and contrasted the light found in the studio with outdoor light, when he wrote: ‘...I suppose that if we studied more in the open air that we should be able to account for such an apparent anomaly. Of this I am quite convinced that no degree of study in the painting room with a small confined light will ever enable one to make any approach to the kind of open daylight reality obtained by the early painters’<sup>465</sup>. Many of these studies provide a foretaste of what will become the attitudes of the Pre-Raphaelites.

It is in the context of this combined interest in early art and outdoor naturalism that Dyce begins to paint his landscapes of the 1850s. The chronology of William’s landscape art is unclear but it can be roughly assumed that *Jacob and Rachel* [Pl. 102] was painted between 1850-

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 826.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 840-841.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 829. Although Perugino died in 1523, he was very much regarded as a 15<sup>th</sup> century painter.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 812-815.

1853; *Titian* in 1857 [Pl. 111]; *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] between 1857–1860; *Pegwell Bay* 1859 [Pl. 113] and the later biblical subjects in 1859–1860. The development of style between the art of the early 1850s when compared to the paintings from the middle of the decade is dramatic. There is a move towards outdoor naturalism where every piece of minute detail is picked up and transferred to the canvas and careful observation is made of light and shadow. Combined with this natural outdoor effect is an increasingly bold use of colour, such as the green in *Titian* [Pl. 111] and the blue in *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86]. Another observable difference is the increasing emphasis given to the landscape, both in detail and its relative size, compared to the human story. A final consideration is an increasing literalness in William's paintings in that Dyce wants to paint a precise contemporary landscape of Scotland but he also wants to transpose the exact Jesus he finds in the Bible onto that scenery<sup>466</sup>.

When considering *Gethsemane* it worth reflecting upon where Dyce stands within the wider art movement and especially in relation to the Pre-Raphaelites. It is often assumed that William Dyce was both a precursor and, later, a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood<sup>467</sup>. In so much as the Pre-Raphaelites purpose was the revival of quattrocento painting, they were doing little more than following Dyce and his vast experience with the Nazarenes. However, the Pre-Raphaelites became more than a revival of quattrocento art; during the 1850s the Brotherhood became almost fanatical regarding attention to detail found in nature and

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<sup>466</sup> For some viewers the contrast between the biblical figures and their literal Scottish setting was a disturbing anachronism; *The Athenaeum* (1860, p.160) asked 'but why – with all this literalness – not be completely loyal, and paint Christ himself in the land where he really lived?' But the *Art Journal* (1859, p.164) did make an earlier point that Dyce was following 'the simple conceptions of early Florentine painters'.

<sup>467</sup> An example of this argument can be seen in Ironside and Gere, *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, 9.



in this Dyce seems to have been willing to follow<sup>468</sup>. It appears that Ruskin's public attack on *Christabel* [Pl. 110a] brought about a new direction for Dyce, where the Scottish painter would put into practice what he had previously written about, which was to paint from nature and incorporate that into landscape art.

### 3.8 Pegwell Bay

In *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] William Dyce paints a religious landscape but in *Pegwell Bay* the Scottish artist constructs a canvas that is deeply rooted in the culture of its time - or maybe things are not quite that straightforward. *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] is an intriguing image; it is a painting that requires constant investigation and for many it is regarded as Dyce's most celebrated landscape. The full title of the work is *Pegwell Bay, Kent – A Recollection of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1858*; Dyce sketched it in 1858, painted in 1859 and exhibited in 1860. The painting recalls an afternoon spent by the artist and his family at Pegwell Bay, a popular holiday resort on the coast between Ramsgate and Sandwich. It seems that Dyce knew the area well, having spent two holidays there in 1857 and 1858, when he made the several sketches and a watercolour that formed the source for his painting. As Dyce constructed his works of art he focused on the natural beauty of the area and, in particular, on the chalk cliffs that dominated the coastline. The painting depicts the beach at low tide, towards the end of an autumn day. The figures that inhabit the shoreline include distant strollers walking on seaweed, men fishing in the rock pools, and a group leading a donkey. There is an artist on the far right –

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<sup>468</sup> Ford Madox Brown, in the *Pretty Baa Lambs*, made his first attempt to paint in the sunlight; at the time these ideals were 'sedulously promulgated by friends' among whom Holman Hunt was foremost. Ford Madox Brown, *The Exhibition of Work and Other Paintings*, (London: Piccadilly, 1865), 4 & 16.

probably William himself – carrying artist's materials. In the foreground, his wife, her two sisters, and one of their sons are collecting shells and fossils.

Dyce as a High Churchman and authority on church ritual and history, as well as a keen scientist, would have been well aware of the significance of the bay where he sought leisure. Pegwell Bay is renowned as the spot where St Augustine first set foot on his mission to bring Christianity to England. During the period of this painting it was very popular to look at the origins of Christianity and also study the popular English shrines of England. In the light of this awareness it is quite possible that Dyce wanted to make a statement about the Christian faith, given the contemporary context of an increasing feeling of crisis in faith due to the questions that science was beginning to ask.

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century beachcombing had become very fashionable as it reflected the Victorian enthusiasm for self improvement and for hobbies that had an educational value. The collecting of fossils was particularly popular; it was seen as chiefly suitable for women and their young children due to the fact that it combined fresh air with the need for gentle exercise as well as a pleasurable but undemanding introduction into the history of nature and the physical world. However, it appears that none of Dyce's family are enjoying themselves and there is none of the boisterous fun and exhilarating freshness that often characterises Victorian views of the seaside. The painting offers something quite different, as if the members of the family are quite separate from one another and lacking the kind of domestic contentment that is often found in this kind of picture.

Rather each figure in *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] seems aloof from the others, strung out in a disconnected line and engaged, not only in their separate tasks, but also in their own individual worlds. Each of the human figures also seems disconnected from the landscape as if it were a place where they do not quite belong. The bright colours of the women's clothes contrast brusquely from the tone-down greys and sombre browns of the bleak setting; their fashionable bonnets, balloon skirts and plaid shawls appear very modern beside the timeless harmony of nature. A mood of disquiet and melancholy pervades the painting.

At one level *Pegwell Bay* can be understood as a simple and faithful depiction of a family outing. However, the discordant elements of the painting – the bleak landscape, the impassive and isolated figures, the sombre stillness of the day – also lead the viewer to ask different questions of the picture and relate them to the contemporary scientific discoveries of the day, especially those concerning geology. The mid-Victorian century witnessed the emergence of revolutionary ideas of how the world was formed. Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830 – 1833) was especially influential at the time. It is an issue that Dyce would have been very much aware of, and it pointed to the view that changes in the landscape were brought about by powerful natural forces, including erosion, sedimentation and movements of the earth's surface. Lyell had claimed that the process was not, as had previously been thought, the result of a series of calamitous events, but was gradual and continuous, taking place over a long period of time. Clues to how the landscape had been formed were still visible and could be discerned by contemporaries in the world around them.

The small bay in Kent was an impressive example of a place where coastal erosion was wearing away the ancient cliffs by up to three meters

a year. Dyce provides, in *Pegwell Bay*, an almost photographic display of this process, showing chalk cliffs embedded with layers of flint and pierced by caves hollowed out by the tide, and the pebble beach where the flat, sedimentary rock of the shoreline had been ground into stones. The painting's title also implicitly alludes to a contemporary event of significance – the appearance of Donati's comet. In Dyce's painting the event is reduced to a barely discernible streak in the sky, which is ignored by everyone but William himself. However, the comet, which was first sighted in July 1858, was supposed to have been the brightest and largest that anyone had ever seen (it was alleged that Donati's comet was at its most brilliant on October 5 that year).

A comet was traditionally seen as a sign in the sky that would foretell death or the overthrow of kings. However, in this age of scientific discovery the correlation between heavenly events and human affairs had been severed. The near invisibility of Donati's comet in Dyce's painting seems to endorse this view. It might suggest the acceptance of the idea that the stars and planets were governed by natural laws that operated independently of God or man. On the other hand, at this very Christian location, it could possibly be that Dyce purposefully included the comet to suggest that in terms of contemporary thinking there was an upheaval in the way society viewed the idea of the Bible's account of creation.

Whatever Dyce had in mind with regard to the comet, *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] does bring together several themes from science – geology, natural history and astronomy. The painting also contains within it a personal deliberation on time: geological deliberation in the erosion of the cliffs; evolutionary deliberation with regard to the presence of fossils; and astronomical deliberation as represented by Donati's comet and even by the diurnal ebb and flow of the tide. This emphasis on time together

with the fact that the landscape itself overpowers the human figures might suggest that Dyce was attempting to contrast the vastness of space and creation with the fleeting nature of human existence: when the millions of years that are involved with shaping the landscape are compared with humanity's existence it seems to amount to little more than an afternoon in the sun. Confronted with the intensity of nature, Dyce's figures appear vulnerable and insignificant. Their apparent indifference to the power of nature – indicated by their ignoring the comet – expresses something of the confusion that seems to characterise an age in which the expansion of scientific knowledge threatened to undermine religious certainty.

As has already been illustrated, Dyce was an accomplished scientist as well as an artist. It can be assumed that Dyce kept up to date with current scientific thought and discovery. One area of scientific knowledge that has often been associated with *Pegwell Bay* was the development of photography; in particular, questions have been asked whether Dyce was painting from a photograph when he completed his painting. Due to the static and particular nature of the finished canvas these questions were beginning to arise soon after the painting was completed. In 1860 *The Art Journal* recorded that, 'The picture of *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] was spoken of by many critical writers as having been painted from a photograph due to its wonderful elaborate detail'<sup>469</sup>. The article does later refute such claims but the suggestion remains.

More recently Marcia Pointon refutes any suggestion that Dyce had painted from a photograph and in particular claims that 'Dyce was not primarily concerned with a literal transcription of his surroundings;'

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<sup>469</sup> Dafforne, 'British Artists', 296.

she asserts that *Pegwell Bay* should be read as a 'symbolic landscape'.<sup>470</sup> Clare Willsdon, however, in her paper 'Dyce in camera: new evidence of his working methods'<sup>471</sup> provides compelling evidence, contrary to Pointon, that Dyce did use photography to paint the 'sharpness of detail' found in his later landscape paintings. Willsdon makes the case that Dyce was in close contact with David Octavius Hill and more particularly George Washington Wilson<sup>472</sup>. Willsdon located an article in the *British Journal of Photography* (1864) that stated that Wilson had provided a photograph to William Dyce for his painting of the *Highland Ferryman* (1858), a painting which was subsequently presented to the Royal Academy<sup>473</sup>. Willsdon then infers the possibility that *Pegwell Bay* may have also been painted from Wilson's photographs on two grounds: first, a photograph of the artist taken on the island of Arran looks very similar to Dyce and the clothes that he is wearing in the *Pegwell Bay* painting while Wilson's studies of low tide scenes correspond very closely with those found in the painting<sup>474</sup>.

George Washington Wilson owned a number of Dyce's paintings and it can be assumed that the two men were in close contact. Dyce died in 1864, which was the same year that Wilson decided to release his article in the *British Journal of Photography*; although Wilson does not name Dyce there is a strong suggestion that it was the Scottish artist. In a time when it would have been deeply frowned upon to paint from a photograph one can assume that Wilson was either trying to protect his

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<sup>470</sup> Marcia Pointon, 'The Representation of Time in Painting: A Study of William Dyce's *Pegwell Bay*: a Recollection of 5 October 1858', *Art History*, I (1978): 100.

<sup>471</sup> C. Willsdon, 'Dyce in Camera: New Evidence of his Working Method', *Burlington Mag.* (Nov. 1990): 760.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 761.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 765.

friend or make some personal gain after his death. Whatever the truth is, *Pegwell Bay* with its fascinating symbolic undertone is a unique painting. In any case it seems quite appropriate for an artist to use their contemporary scientific instruments, such as the era's photographic equipment, to bring into play the scientific questions that were being discussed in an age of personal crises.

*Pegwell Bay* was painted the year before Darwin published his theory of evolution, which brought into sharp focus the calamity that Dyce now faced in his own patterns of belief. For an artist and Christian man who looked back to the certainties of the medieval church to find artistic inspiration the questions of biblical authenticity with regard to the creation account must have tested Dyce very deeply. *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] depicts quite beautifully Dyce's grappling with the place of the human being within the vast natural landscape. It appears that Dyce, the committed High Churchman, was coming to a crossroads in his religious outlook. *Pegwell Bay* is a work of art that exists within an immanent theological framework in that Dyce is dealing with those issues in wider society that were beginning to impinge on his own religious outlook. What makes the work more complex is that the hidden themes behind the painting, its location for example, still speaks of a man of faith who is holding on to transcendent concepts. Three companion pieces to this painting were to follow: *The Good Shepherd* [pl. 114], *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115] and *David in the Wilderness* - where extreme outdoor naturalism was captured and figures from the Bible carefully represented. Here Dyce takes his transcendent concepts of faith and places them into an immanent framework.

### 3.9 Biblical Landscapes

One of the interesting facts with regard to William Dyce's artistic life is that he painted the highly acclaimed symbolic landscape *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] at the time of the spiritual crises generated by Darwin publishing his theory of evolution, yet his next offerings are some of his most memorable biblical landscapes. This most celebrated time of Dyce's career also has the backdrop of his ongoing work of fresco painting in the Houses of Parliament. The question that needs to be carefully considered is: are these paintings, that he completed before and after *Pegwell Bay*, a continuation of the same theme or a reaction against the questions being asked with regard to faith? Hence, are we to understand these paintings primarily as landscape art that stresses the importance of immanence or as biblical subject canvases that point to transcendence?

Marcia Pointon argues that the main intention of Dyce was to present biblical subject art. Pointon states that the literary sources that Dyce draws upon are largely limited to the Bible, Shakespeare, and Dante<sup>475</sup>; and that William's reputation rests primarily on a series of paintings of the Madonna, Christ and his immediate relatives, and a number of carefully chosen Old Testament subjects. The intention of the artist must also be considered when a balance needs to be struck with regard to the emphasis placed upon the subject or the landscape. His intention could possibly be discerned in the titles that he gives to each of his paintings – *The Good Shepherd* [Pl. 114], *The Man of Sorrows* [pl. 115], *David in the Wilderness*: in each case there is no reference to landscape only to the subject. The fact that Dyce's subject matter was limited does not mean that it was random. On the contrary it seems that

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<sup>475</sup> Pointon, *Dyce*, 161.



Dyce carefully chose his biblical subjects to reconcile historic religion with the needs of contemporary life.

On the other hand, as has already been discussed, there was a repositioning of William Dyce's expression of landscapes throughout the 1850s. In *Jacob and Rachel* (1850) [Pl. 102] it appears that the landscape was an afterthought in Dyce's overtly subject-centred piece of art; however, in the middle of the decade Dyce paints *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* [Pl. 111] where the subject is positioned in a naturalistic landscape. In *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] the subject becomes literally smaller when compared to the landscape and the scenery itself becomes more literal, where every tree and blade of grass is painted in precise detail. And for the most famous of Dyce's landscape paintings *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113], completed at the end of the 1850s, there is no biblical subject theme. Allen Staley in his book *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* has meticulously studied the content of Dyce's landscape paintings and has looked for clues that relate the Scottish artist to the Pre-Raphaelites. His conclusion is that Dyce was an artist who 'built upon Pre-Raphaelitism to paint a handful of the most memorable pictures of the Victorian era'<sup>476</sup> and that therefore any of William's later paintings should be considered in terms of outdoor naturalism landscape art. It seems that in order to take Dyce's later work seriously it is essential to combine his emphasis on the historic religious subject with Victorian views of outdoor naturalism. Therefore, it is important to gain some understanding of both William's history of biblical landscape painting and to compare his religious paintings with those of his contemporaries.

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<sup>476</sup> Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), Chapter 8.

This sense of using biblical landscapes is even more explicit in *St John Leading the Blessed Virgin from the Tomb* [Pl. 92]. What is significant about this painting is that the biblical scene is used to convey a mood of desolation and loss. The sky is dark and the clouds are low on the horizon, implying a windless hush of dusk. St John and the Virgin are separated from the background activity at the tomb, where the two Marys kneel and Joseph of Arimathea, carrying the linen sheets in which he had wrapped Jesus, leaves the tomb's enclosure. The old city of Jerusalem can be seen in the distance whilst St John leads the Virgin by the hand over the stony ground and out into the barren world. This feeling of atmosphere is certainly established in Dyce's later works of art but the use of biblical scenery is replaced by an impression that Dyce wanted his viewer to understand that the biblical Jesus trod on the real earth – an attitude very different to what many of his contemporaries were doing.

It would seem that Dyce would have had a lot in common with John Rogers Herbert. Herbert was originally a High Anglican (who later converted to Roman Catholicism) and a member of the Etching Club, who worked with Dyce at the School of Design. However, Herbert's painting *Our Saviour Subject to His Parents at Nazareth* (1856) exhibits a distinct lack of imagination; it is a conscious move towards archaism<sup>477</sup> [Pl. 116] and his work *Laborare est Orare* [Pl. 117] simply does not display the conviction of Dyce's moral assertion<sup>478</sup>. William Henry Fiske's *The Last Night of Jesus Christ in His Nazarene Home* pays close attention to the narrative but this reduces the impact of the subject; this is

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<sup>477</sup> This painting, now in the Guildhall Art Gallery, was exhibited at the R.A. in 1847 but later reworked and given the date of 1856.

<sup>478</sup> Tate Gallery, London; R.A. 1862. The painting is a pleasant depiction of the monks of St Bernard's Abbey gathering the harvest.

unlike Dyce whose atmospheric landscape enhances the impression of the biblical character<sup>479</sup>.

Dyce, whose biblical subjects were influenced by the Nazarenes and whose landscapes were inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite movement, was beginning to do something quite distinct towards the end of the 1850s. He did not look to the Holy Land for geographically accurate landscape background. His native scenery had far more to offer an artist who valued the symbolic and emotive qualities of landscape as a means of conveying a specific religious conviction. At the same time the biblical figures had a sense of religious authenticity that can be identified in all of Dyce's religious paintings from the 1830s onward; however, they are not archaic but very human in their form. This is the context in which the next section will consider a number of these paintings: *The Good Shepherd* [Pl. 114], *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115], and *David in the Wilderness*.

### 3.9.1 The Good Shepherd

In the same year that William Dyce painted *Pegwell Bay* [Pl. 113] he exhibited the *Good Shepherd* [Pl. 114]. The difference between the two paintings is very noticeable. In *Pegwell Bay* the viewer is presented with a pure landscape with no biblical subject; on the other hand *The Good Shepherd* comprises a landscape that is almost dominated by the figure of Christ. In this respect *The Good Shepherd* is unique when compared with other biblical landscapes painted by Dyce during the late 1850s.

*The Good Shepherd* comprises a full-length Jesus, with a lamb resting on his left arm and a crook in his right hand, guiding sheep through a narrow opening into an enclosed field. The painting draws its

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<sup>479</sup> Displayed at the Royal Academy in 1864.

inspiration from St John's Gospel where Jesus declares, 'I am the good shepherd'<sup>480</sup>. The particular verse that Dyce seems to be drawing on is verse 16, where Jesus announces, 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd'<sup>481</sup>; the original meaning of the scriptural verses point to those outside Judaism being brought into the one pen so that all God's people will have one shepherd. The painting itself portrays three sheep, standing in the dark shadows of the wall by the sheep pen, waiting to following Jesus through the 'narrow' gate<sup>482</sup>. The gap in the wall seems unusually narrow so that only one sheep at a time may fit through. The fields beyond depict soft rolling hills that shine in the light of the day. The sheep already in the fields are free to roam the luxurious splendour of these hills, lie or graze on the plentiful grass. Could it be that Dyce is painting a parable for the modern onlooker?

The scene is, as *The Art Journal* recognised, overtly, even aggressively contemporary<sup>483</sup>. Staley agrees when he expresses the opinion that *The Good Shepherd* was placed in a 'cultivated country, such as might be seen in any rural district around London'<sup>484</sup>. The landscape surrounding Jesus consists of a modern farm building in the distance, a feeding trough fixed around a dead tree and a pen that is secured by a modern fence. The countryside would have not looked out of place in most parts of Victoria's rural Britain. The only figure that does not quite capture the mood of the mid-Victorian rural landscape is Jesus himself. Christ is wearing a long flowing robe and displays a bare left foot; his

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<sup>480</sup> John 10: 11-18

<sup>481</sup> John 10: 16

<sup>482</sup> Matthew 7: 13-14

<sup>483</sup> *The Art Journal*. 1859, 164.

<sup>484</sup> Staley, *Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 165.

beard is cut short but his hair flows down the back of his neck. However, the representation of Jesus is neither medieval nor Raphaelesque but has very human qualities as Jesus looks down with care and feeling on the lamb resting on his arm. Dyce's deliberate presentation of biblical characters as very human and existing in a physical environment described in concrete detail is essential to his theological interpretation of his subject and is not merely a means of evoking the ethos of an earlier style of art or of creating an anachronistic appeal. The biblical subject certainly engages the viewer but so does the landscape.

The *Good Shepherd* [Pl. 114] is located in a detailed landscape that would have required from the artist many hours of careful observation of light, colour and shadow. The introduction of the ivy around the open gate relates the painting to the Pre-Raphaelite art from which *The Good Shepherd*, in part, draws its inspiration - both in terms of extreme naturalism and overt symbolism. The fact that the landscape can be admired in its own right was noted by a number of commentators when they observed Dyce's biblical landscapes of the late 1850s; Staley suggests, 'There is some correspondence between the figures and their barren setting, but the pictures could stand almost as well without the figures, simply as clearly seen and precisely detailed Scottish landscapes. They are views of Highland scenery into which figures seem to have strayed accidentally'<sup>485</sup>.

Two further paintings of the late 1850s – *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115] and *David in the Wilderness* – combine both biblical subjects and landscape naturalism. Both paintings are on identical panels of millboard and both seem to have been painted at the same time (around 1859–

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<sup>485</sup> Staley, *Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 165.

1860). *David in the Wilderness* was never exhibited in Dyce's lifetime while *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115] was shown at the Royal Academy in 1860. Subsequent to Dyce's death in 1864 both paintings have been exhibited several times but under different names and they form part of the Stuart collection and hang in the National Gallery of Scotland<sup>486</sup>.

### 3.9.2 The Man of Sorrows

It would be difficult to ascertain from the original title (as above) from which part of the Bible Dyce drew his inspiration when he painted his *Man of Sorrows* [Pl 115]; several references from scripture come to mind – the painting could be an extension of the *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] theme or it could be a generalised painting where the isolated Jesus ponders his impending fate. However, an inscription from John Keble accompanied the picture and was inscribed into the frame:

'As, when upon His drooping head  
His Father's light was pour'd from heaven,  
What time, unsheltered and unfed,  
Far in the wild His steps were driven,  
High thoughts were with Him in that hour,  
Untold, unspeakable on earth.

These words, inscribed by one of the Oxford Movement's chief protagonists, give a clue to what Dyce was pondering when he painted *The Man of Sorrows*. The painting exemplifies the image of the solitary Jesus driven out 'far in the wild', without shelter and unfed. 'The story of

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<sup>486</sup> In later years the titles of the paintings varied. In 1869, at the Wedgwood Memorial Institute, Burslem, they were *Christ in the Wilderness* and *David as a Youth*. In the same year, the latter painting was exhibited at Liverpool as *The Sweet Psalmist*. The two were sold at Christies on 17 February 1933: 'As When upon His Drooping Head / His Father's Light was Poured from Heaven' and *Christ in the Wilderness*.

Jesus being driven out' into the wilderness before he commences his public ministry is found in the synoptic Gospels<sup>487</sup>. The story is that during the last days of his fast the devil tempted Jesus but at that 'hour' the 'thoughts' of Christ were with his Father. On the other hand each of the Gospels refers to Jesus being driven out into the desert. It can be assumed that deserts in themselves are wild but in any case they would have looked very different to the landscape that Dyce portrays.

On occasion Dyce does place a biblical landscape behind the central figures but very rarely does he paint a desert view. The landscape to accompany his early portraits usually contains an aspect that includes rocks, grass, trees and the occasional building. Observing an early *Madonna and Child* (1838) that William painted it is revealing how little detail he orchestrated when a comparison is made with the canvases of the late 1850s [Pl. 118]. The rocks in the foreground of the *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115] contain elaborate features. In them, primary importance is given to the accumulation of minutely realised detail of rocks and blades of grass. The whole landscape is void of any kind of life other than Jesus himself and there is an unnerving sense of silence. When observing the painting the focus of interest could easily move from the biblical subject to the landscape. It could be said that the *The Man of Sorrows* contains a literal view of Highland scenery into which biblical personages have strayed. The literal view of this landscape was picked up by *The Athenaeum* when it voiced the opinion, 'But why – with all this literalness – not be completely loyal, and paint Christ himself in the land where he really lived?'<sup>488</sup>.

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<sup>487</sup> Matthew 4: 1-11, Mark: 1:12,13, Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>488</sup> *The Athenaeum* (1860), 160.

On the other hand the work could be seen primarily as a religious subject painting where the mood and the landscape are beautifully used to reinforce the artist's presentation of Christ the man in his most human predicament. As in *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] Jesus is dressed in long flowing robes, wearing a short beard and long parted in the middle. However, on this occasion Christ is sitting on a rock with his head bowed low and his hands clutched in prayer. If *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] indicates a journey that Jesus must face then in the *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 115] Dyce points to a Christ who is in the midst of a titanic struggle; yet, this is a Jesus who, at his hour of need, is sublimely in control. This is a moment of priestly prayer where the onlooker may observe but cannot be involved; as Keble explains 'His thoughts' were 'untold' and 'unspeakable of earth'.

It seems reductionist to demote this engrossing piece of art to either a landscape or a religious subject painting. To regard the *The Man of Sorrows* as a biblical landscape seems to summarise the very essence of what William Dyce was trying to express in his art towards the end of the 1850s. Dyce meticulously paints his native Scotland to catch every piece of detail, blade of grass and craggy rock. Then again, Dyce was not only a modern naturalist painter; he cared passionately about his own understanding of the Christian faith and wanted a medieval representation of Jesus in a landscape. Jesus seems to have his reference point in another age or a different place.

### 3.9.3 David as a Youth

On the back of the frame of *David as a Youth* is an inscription that states *Christ in the Wilderness*. However, it is difficult to imagine that the painting of a figure holding a harp and a staff was ever meant to be Jesus. Earlier sketches that Dyce makes of David depict the Old Testament king



with harp and staff. The first shows David leaning on his staff with the harp flung over his shoulder. The second displays what will become the figure for the completed painting, David with his feet astride and holding his staff in his right hand and the harp in his left.

Another old inscription, this time on the back of the canvas, gives the title of the picture as *David when a Shepherd and Skilful Harpist*. The earlier name is a good illustration of the passage from the Bible from which Dyce drew his inspiration. 1 Samuel 16 gives an account of the young shepherd boy being chosen as the 'Lord's anointed one'. When Samuel, the Lord's prophet, makes his search for the chosen one among the sons of Jesse we are told that he chooses David 'who is still attending his sheep'<sup>489</sup>. David moves from the service of shepherding to the service of King Saul. Saul we are told is tormented by the spirit from God and his only respite is when 'David would take his harp and play'<sup>490</sup>. The painting therefore, with David gazing heavenward, illustrates the profession that he is leaving and the one he must accept.

When compared to the other biblical landscapes of this period painted by Dyce, it is staggering how little has been written on painting *David as a Youth*. Marcia Pointon, for example, only refers to the work when comparing and contrasting it with the other biblical landscapes of this period; maybe this is because the subject of David does not draw the attention in the same way that Jesus does or perhaps this is owing to the difference in atmosphere of the landscape. *Gethsemane* [Pl. 86] and *The Man of Sorrows* [Pl. 95] are deeply serious paintings, highly melancholic and containing a hush of contemplative silence; it may be that that kind of mood demands serious academic study. Nevertheless, *David as a Youth*

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<sup>489</sup> 1 Samuel 16: 11

<sup>490</sup> 1 Samuel 16: 23

as a painting has a lot to offer. David is shown jubilant, feet astride, looking heavenward. This is a young and confident David perched on a ledge and ready for his future vocation. The landscape around him is literal and portrays a scene from the Scottish Highlands. The claustrophobic dark valley of *Gethsemane* has gone and has been replaced by a more open and optimistic valley. The sheep that are scattered around David illustrate the profession from which he is called. The landscape is once again very detailed and it is as if the young David has been planted unto it.

#### 3.9.4 William Dyce as Painter of Biblical Landscapes

When one compares Dyce's biblical landscapes with, for instance, the fresco *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad* [Pl. 103] it becomes apparent that the landscapes are concerned with the way in which spiritual experience affects the human condition while the fresco has a more other world revelatory quality. The biblical landscapes deliver an experience of a human being walking upon solid earth in the same way that each observer of the pictures does. The nature of the biblical subject of the landscape is captured through Dyce's meticulous and determined attention to these figures as human beings. Through clarity and unemotional quality of statement Dyce presents the figures and does not dress them up in extraneous devices. Dyce's concern for humanity is displayed in the themes that he chooses for his Old and New Testament characters: maternity, bereavement, rebellion, patient and stoical acceptance of misfortune, responsibility, love and devotion.

The subjects of Dyce's later biblical paintings stress the cerebral, the spiritual and the mental rather than the sensuous or narrative elements of the theme. The painting of the subjects seems at times, precise but also

rigid. The figures seem to have no concept of movement in space but appear to have been imposed onto the landscape. The Old and New Testament characters that Dyce paints at one time seem very human but they also have a sense of literal biblical interpretation that slips back into anachronism. In spite of this what keeps the biblical scenes contemporary and allows the viewer to relate to the humanity of the characters is the up-to-date naturalism of the landscape.

This is where the brilliance of Dyce comes to the fore in that he retains the dignity of the biblical subjects but at the same time allows them to be fresh by placing them into contemporary British landscapes which every observer could relate to. In brief, the Nazarenes taught Dyce how to paint biblical subjects, the Pre-Raphaelites influenced him with regard to the painting of nature as it is observed, but Dyce combined them to allow the Christ of the Bible to be present in the world as it existed in his time. Consequently, whether Dyce painted his landscapes *plein air* or from a photograph, this is irrelevant when compared to his greater task, which was to convey the transcendent Christ in whom he had faith, celebrated in the immanent landscape in which he lived and which he admired.

### 3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has carefully examined the life and paintings of William Dyce. Dyce was born into a prosperous family on the east coast of Scotland, was highly educated and was a devout High Anglican. It is evident from his early life that William had a traditional historic view of God in creation and this more conservative vision on life and faith was reinforced when he associated with the Nazarenes. The Nazarenes were a conservative group that was attempting to return to the values of the art of

the Middle Ages. Dyce's appeal to another age and time in art can be seen at an early stage when he paints a bible and rosary in the setting of Rosalyn Chapel. Therefore, Dyce could be regarded as having a strong belief in a transcendent God who has ordered and fixed the world at particular moments in history.

In William's early paintings the Scottish artist experiments with subject and landscape. Initially Dyce focused upon the importance of subject, especially biblical subjects, including his early depiction of the *Madonna and Child*. In these paintings the landscape seemed an afterthought and, on occasion, might represent what might be termed a 'biblical scene'. However, Dyce categorically stated that he was not interested in merely replicating the past but wanted to speak to a contemporary audience. It may therefore be assumed that Dyce found his own personal devotional image of Jesus from the Middle Ages but wanted him to live in a modern setting.

William Dyce was an educated artist who had enjoyed the rigours of a formal education and moved in the highest social circles. Taking this into account William would have been very much aware, influenced and inspired by contemporary religious debates in art. This chapter has made the case that these debates were very much divided between what might have been regarded as Catholic, regressive and medieval and Protestant, progressive and contemporary. William Dyce was not a Roman Catholic nor a Protestant but a High Episcopalian who was influenced by the music and liturgy of another time – by music from the sixteenth century and art from the medieval world.

In Dyce's paintings we see a degree of sophistication and often an implicit sermon on the canvas, as we see in *Omnia Vanitas*. In *Jacob and Rachel* William emphasises the importance of the biblical subjects whilst

paying little attention to the background. It is in these biblical subjects that Dyce is conveying meaning and truth; these are not symbolic representations but literal. In *Jacob and Rachel* we see the most obvious connection between Nazarene art and the Pre-Raphaelite movement where William is, in part, responsible for transporting the medieval into the nineteenth century.

In William's *Titian Preparing to Make his First Essay in Colouring* we witness an important moment in Dyce's artistic life where he moves from being a leader to being a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In *Titian* Dyce pays greater attention to the detail of the landscape; the garden setting becomes a profusion of colour and everything is captured with meticulous skill. In *Gethsemane* William continues on his journey of naturalistic landscape art but on this occasion the canvas is full of his own personal conviction. The figure of Jesus is placed into the landscape.

Dyce, like most Christian thinkers of the time, was influenced by the events in the wider society and discoveries in science. *Pegwell Bay* was deeply rooted in the culture of its time and its display coincided with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. In the painting the landscape overpowers the human figures and Donati's Comet is a representation of the stars and planets being governed by natural laws and are independent of God.

Possibly in reaction to Pegwell Bay William then proceeded to paint a number of biblical landscapes. The first of these was *The Good Shepherd* where the scene was drawing on contemporary thinking, in that Dyce paints exactly what he sees, yet the landscape is dominated by the medieval figure of Jesus. *The Man of Sorrows* and *David as a Youth*, in the same vein, place the historic biblical figure into a very current day setting. None of these biblical characters stands out from their natural

surroundings but each is rather placed into them. The biblical figures, although very human, seem to be inspired by the Nazarenes whilst the natural landscape is inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites. It would therefore be possible to conclude that when Dyce contemplated religion or religious figures he moved towards transcendence, seeking a God that was located in another time or another place. On the other hand when Dyce wished to paint the natural landscape he moved towards immanence and chose a very contemporary understanding of landscape.

## Chapter 4: From Transcendence to Immanence – An Examination of two Contemporary Scottish Artists’ Response to Progress

When Scottish people come together to celebrate their national identity they do so with symbols that are steeped in tradition and antiquity. The men wear the kilt, with each clan with its own tartan, and there is a wail of the bagpipes. The problem is that things are not quite what they seem; the traditions do not go as far back into the distant past as first thought. An English industrialist from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson, invented the short kilt in the early eighteenth century. The plaid was adapted to make it convenient for workmen – to bring the Highlanders out of the heather and into the factory. In the same way enterprising tailors in the Victorian period devised many of the clan tartans that are worn today<sup>491</sup>.

These realities have been conveyed by Eric Hobsbawm in his book *The Invention of Tradition* and highlight a number of important facts. First, a lot of ‘ancient’ traditions have their roots, not in the distant past, but in Victorian Britain. Second, these traditions were adopted by a society that was undergoing rapid change and were a kind of escapism into an historic narrative. It has been argued in the first chapter of this thesis that there was a tension at the heart of Victorian life between those who embraced progress and those who, in the face of change, searched for solace in another place – this conflict and search took place within the same individual and not just between different individuals. This tension at the heart of Victorian life created a complex theological framework where immanence was becoming more dominant but where

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<sup>491</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 87.

transcendence was still possible. These findings encouraged me to investigate the works of two nineteenth century Scottish Christian artists – William McTaggart and William Dyce – to uncover any hints of a yearning for another world in the light of a rapidly changing society.

In Victorian Britain there were many technological advances that demonstrated in a very material way that things were changing, moving forward and endorsing ideals of progress. A symbolic example of this technological progress was the steam train, which allowed many to cross the country and opened areas that had previously been out of sight<sup>492</sup>. To draw a parallel with today's world, the development of science and technology over the last 100 years is a clear demonstration of the speed of progress. In 1957 the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, was launched into space; forty years later there are 1,100 active artificial satellites in orbit around the earth<sup>493</sup>. This proliferation of satellite technology allows instantaneous communication from any part of the world to another. The increase in the migration of people from one country to another for short or extended periods of time has been made possible through the affordability and availability of air travel<sup>494</sup>. And, probably the most important new communication technology, the Internet, has spread from the USA to the rest of the world creating a new social environment facilitated by Facebook and Twitter<sup>495</sup>.

This technological expansion has facilitated the movement of finance around the world. Wall Street and the London Stock Exchange have become real powerhouses in a world economy where seemingly

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<sup>492</sup> In mid-Victorian Britain 6,000 miles of railways were opened creating the basic network for the nation. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Birth of the Industrial Revolution* rev. ed. (New York: New Press, 1999), 93.

<sup>493</sup> <http://www.celetrak.com/satcat> The United Kingdom launched its first satellite in 1962.

<sup>494</sup> It is estimated that there are 30 000 passenger flights in the United States each day. <http://www.natca.org>.

<sup>495</sup> Facebook has currently 900 million users around the world. Dominic Rushe, *The Guardian*, Friday 18 May, 2012.



limitless wealth can be made and lost overnight; at the same time it seems that the manufacturing of goods has been relegated to the second division of wealth creation<sup>496</sup>. An economist like Clive Cook in *The Economist* may be extolling the virtues of this new economy too far when he argues that this new liberal economy is a 'force for good' and that it might be the 'only feasible cure for poverty'<sup>497</sup>. On the other hand critics of these new trends in progressive economics, including George Monbiot in his book *The Captive State*, point to the widening gap between rich and poor<sup>498</sup>. However, what does seem to be unfolding is that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening up of China to the West, liberal economics and free trade are becoming the dominant world philosophy; Edward Luttwak calls this new unrivalled system of economics – 'turbo capitalism'<sup>499</sup>. A rapidly changing environment creates a new context in which it is important to bring our thinking up to date.

Therefore, this final chapter will deliberate how the individual believer relates to the divine in the present-day twenty first century world, where the rate of progress has become ever more rapid. The chapter will open by looking at belief in contemporary Britain; there follows a consideration of the works of two present day Scottish artists; it will then compare the faith of the modern day artists with those of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>496</sup> The 'Big Bang' on the London Stock Exchange took place on the 27 October 1986 and was a term used to describe the deregulation of financial markets and the introduction of electronic, screen-based trading.

<sup>497</sup> Clive Cook, "The Case for Globalisation", *The Economist* (2001): 1-3.

<sup>498</sup> George Monbiot, *Captive State* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>499</sup> Will Hutton & Anthony Giddens, *On the Edge* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 1.

## 4.1 Secularisation and Unattached Belief

If in Victorian Britain the ‘naivety’ of some Christian doctrines was attacked, creating a sense of religious crisis, then within the contemporary world it can be argued that the process of providing a completely alternative framework to religion, through the process of secularisation, is well established. Secularisation is regarded as the transformation of a society from close identification with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions. In general the secularisation thesis refers to the belief that as societies ‘progress’, particularly through modernisation and rationalisation, religion loses its authority in all aspects of life and social governance<sup>500</sup>. Social scientists such as Max Weber linked the emergence of rationality and the development of science as a substitute for superstition – or what Weber referred to as the ‘disenchantment of the world’<sup>501</sup>. The real problem in bringing attention to the process of secularisation is the amount of material available. It is therefore my intention that this chapter should highlight a few areas of thought that are not exhaustive but that might be useful in linking the context in which my Scottish Victorian artists painted to the contemporary world.

In trying to provide some useful markers with regards to the process of secularisation this chapter will initially refer to Charles Taylor’s book *A Secular Age*<sup>502</sup>. The book provides three areas of discussion that are very informative with regard to the process of

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<sup>500</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart *The Secularization Debate: Sacred and Secular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chapter 1.

<sup>501</sup> Sung Ho Kim ‘Max Weber’. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (24 August, 2007), 21. Retrieved 17 February 2010. It seems as if Weber himself was quite hostile to this development criticising it for dehumanising individuals as ‘cogs in the machine’ and seeing the world as less mystical as it moved from polytheistic religions to monotheism and finally to the godless science of modernity.

<sup>502</sup> Charles Taylor, *A secular Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

secularisation. The third topic of discussion, in particular, as well as providing the platform for the rest of Taylor's book, is useful in providing a sense of continuity with the Victorian age.

First, Taylor makes the case that secularisation can be understood as the emptying of God from the public space. This view of secularisation is well understood when there is a process of 'differentiation' and 'rationalisation' of public institutions that are removed from the hands of the clergy and passed to the specialist. It is argued that various spheres of activity – political, economic, cultural, recreational, professional, and educational – are functioning without reference to God<sup>503</sup>. Therefore, the case is put that these activities rather than making reference to religious belief, resolve issues in accordance with an internal 'rationality'. On the other hand it must be stressed that this removal of the religious from public life does not necessarily result in a loss of faith within the nation. The United States would be an obvious example of where there is a very definite separation of Church and State but has one of the highest statistics for religious belief and practice in Western society<sup>504</sup>.

Second, Taylor contends that secularisation can be comprehended in terms of the falling off of religious belief and practice. That is, when we compare attendance at church today with some arbitrary 'Golden Age' in the past then things are getting worse - that is, that fewer people are Christian. In this sense, the countries of Western Europe have mainly become secular – even those that might retain some vestiges of public

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<sup>503</sup> Care needs to be taken here; for example, today 1 million children attend Church of England Schools and 15 million people alive today went to one. Also, 45 out of the 109 new academies are Anglican, where the Church is the biggest provider in England. <http://churchofengland.org>.

<sup>504</sup> It is estimated that 118 million people go to Church each Sunday in the United States, roughly 40% of the population. <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research>.

reference to God. Thus, the Semana Santa de Sevilla [Pl. 119] with its processions of wooden sculptures depicting events from the Passion and images of the Virgin Mary showing restrained grief for the torture and killing of her Son, may be one of the most important public events in Spain but this is not reflected in private adherence to Church attendance<sup>505</sup>.

With regard to secularisation the first two points are connected and are important; however, the third point that Taylor highlights suggests connections to Chapter 1 of this thesis and is more specifically useful when considering my two current artists. Taylor not only wants to focus on religion in the public sphere and the numbers of churchgoers; he also wants to discuss 'conditions of belief'. What Taylor seems to mean when he talks about 'conditions of belief' is the move of a society where the religious inheritance of that nation was taken without question to one where that religious faith is regarded as one option among others. In stating his case Taylor gives the example of the contrast between attendance at church in the United States and the numbers at Friday mosque in Pakistan, which might be very similar. Nonetheless, there is a sharp contrast between the two societies in 'what it is to believe', stemming in part from the fact that belief is an option in what has been a Christian society (and sometimes not an easy one) but not so in the Muslim one<sup>506</sup>.

What is interesting is that Taylor traces the genesis for some of these alternatives to belief to the mid-nineteenth century - the so-called century of 'religious doubt'. In the modern day setting Taylor highlights the milieu where it can be hard to sustain a faith, where there are people

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<sup>505</sup> Around 25% of the population of Spain attends church at some point in the year; however, the weekly attendance would be a lot fewer. <http://www.nationmaster.com>.

<sup>506</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

who feel bound to give up even though they may mourn the loss. In this milieu, as Taylor puts it, there are many trajectories of belief that seem to run counter to the Christian faith, which are articulated in various 'Death of God' theories and have been more recently gathered into a humanist framework which dispels religious content altogether<sup>507</sup>. Therefore, what might have started as questions of 'doubt' in the nineteenth century have progressed to questions of 'doubt in what?'

However, this may be taking the issue too far. Despite these other options many surveys have indicated that the choice to follow the Christian faith is still strong in Britain<sup>508</sup>. On some analyses belief may still be widespread despite the relatively low weekly attendance at church; I refer to this as unattached belief. To help me consider this idea I will make reference to Grace Davie's book *Religion in Britain Since 1945* and highlight three areas for reflection: statistical information, the idea of a common religion and the persistence of the sacred in society<sup>509</sup>.

Grace Davie considers religious faith in Britain since the Second World War. In Chapter 4 she affirms what secularisation has already assumed: a continuous decline in church membership in modern day Britain. Davie refers to statistics that highlight the fact that total church membership has declined from 8 000,000 in 1975 to 6 700,000 in 1992 and that only 14.4% of the population in the 1990s now claim membership, in an active sense, of a Christian church. She concludes that 'relatively few British people either belong to a church or attend religious services with any regularity, and those among the indigenous population

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<sup>507</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2-3, 581-582.

<sup>508</sup> The 2011 Census showed that 59.5% of the United Kingdom described themselves as Christian.  
[ons.gov.uk](http://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>509</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994).

that do either of these things divide their attentions pretty evenly between Anglican, Catholic and free church categories'<sup>510</sup>. However, she suggests that even though church attendance is declining the overall religious community size still remains strong especially with regards to Anglicans, whose overall constituency is around twenty seven million. As a result Davie argues that, '...most, if not all, of the British retain some sort of religious belief even if they do not see the need to attend their churches on a regular basis.....and, secularism, at least in a developed sense, remains the creed for a relative small minority'<sup>511</sup>. If this unattached belief is common in the United Kingdom then what does this look like in practice?

So far Davie has made the case that Christian nominalism is a more prevalent phenomenon than secularism in British society, that 'between two-thirds and three quarters of British people indicate fairly consistently that they believe in some sort of God'<sup>512</sup>. In the light of these findings we need some understanding of what the phrase belief in God means. Davie highlights the idea of 'common religion', where she expresses the faith of the less active believing majority in terms of a faith that is more individually expressive and a spirituality that has moved away from the orthodox church position; these ideas are also expressed by Abercrombie<sup>513</sup>:

The tentative conclusion is that religious belief, when not associated with active membership of a church, tends to be associated with superstitious belief

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<sup>510</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, 45.

<sup>511</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, 47.

<sup>512</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, 47. The latest Census (2011) indicated that 59.3% of people in England and Wales were Christian. Whilst in Scotland 53.% of Scottish people claimed adherence to the Christian faith.

<sup>513</sup> Overall Abercrombie is more negative than Davie, in that he sees those not believing as superstitious whereas Davie still thinks some correct aspects of rudimentary religion.

while church attendance tends to be antithetical to superstition. Moreover, we have evidence that for those people who do not go to church yet say they are religious and pray often, religious belief has moved quite far from the orthodox church position and is really much closer to what would normally be called superstition<sup>514</sup>.

In chapter 6 Davie expresses what seems to be the main theme of her book, which is 'Believing Without Belonging' and how the sacred is persistent in British society despite a decline in church going<sup>515</sup>. In making the case that belief is more prevalent in British society than aggressive opposition Davie investigates belief with reference to the regions of the United Kingdom, class, church models, denominations and religious broadcasting. With regards class she contends that belief and practice depend on the social grouping to which the individual belongs. Hence, the higher the social grouping, the greater the possibility of unbelief; yet where belief exists in this grouping there is a greater possibility that the person of faith will attend church. On the other hand the lower the social class the greater the propensity not to put belief into practice.

When comparing the writings of Taylor and Davie a number of conclusions can be made with regard to the current debate on secularisation in modern day Britain. Both offer evidence that there are many vectors of belief competing for the attention of individuals within contemporary society and the Christian faith is just one. Yet, according to Davie, the option of faith remains strong. Despite the decline in church attendance many people in Britain say that they believe in God even

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<sup>514</sup> N. Abercrombie and A. Warde (eds), *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 139.

<sup>515</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, 93.

though this belief may have become more personal and less institutionalised and has moved away from what might be regarded as orthodox church practices.

When compared to Victorian society the way in which the believer relates to the divine has changed from a position of where the majority of the population related to God through the institutional church to one where the majority of the people find God in other ways and outside the mainstream church. If belief persists within society but takes place beyond the church, this needs examining. The thesis will now look at two modern Scottish artists, Andy Goldsworthy and Peter Howson; it will investigate their spirituality and deliberate the extent to which they relate to the divine and whether this is in any way different to their Victorian counterparts. As will emerge in due course, my choice of these two artists is deliberate since, apart from their both working in Scotland, Howson can in some ways be seen as the modern equivalent of Dyce and Goldsworthy of McTaggart.

## 4.2 Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy lives and works in Scotland. Goldsworthy is a sculptor, photographer and an environmentalist, who produces site-specific sculpture and land art in predominantly natural settings<sup>516</sup>.

Andy Goldsworthy was born in Cheshire in 1956 but grew up on the Harrogate side of Leeds, West Yorkshire. Goldsworthy's father was a professor of applied mathematics at the university of Leeds. The family home was on a housing estate but edging the green belt. From the age of thirteen Goldsworthy worked on nearby farms as a labourer and likened

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<sup>516</sup> Land art is an art movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s, in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked. It is an art form that is created in nature, using natural materials such as soil, rock, logs branches, leaves and water. Sculptures are not placed in the landscape; rather, the landscape is the means of their creation.



the repetitive quality of farm tasks to the routine of making sculpture<sup>517</sup>. He studied fine art at Bradford College of Art (1974-1975) before completing his degree at Preston Polytechnic in 1978. After leaving college Goldsworthy worked in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria before moving to Scotland in 1985. In 1993 Andy Goldsworthy received an honorary degree from the University of Bradford and was subsequently made the A.D. White Professor-At-Large at Cornell University, New York.

Goldsworthy describes himself as a sculptor who ‘works directly with the land and uses materials found in the landscape’<sup>518</sup>. In demonstrating this artistic style using pieces of slate Goldsworthy explains that he does not draw onto the slate by using a piece of chalk, but creates a line drawn out of the slate by another slate<sup>519</sup>. In trying to remain close to the natural world Goldsworthy uses an array of materials including: stones, snow, leaves, mud, icicles and brightly coloured flowers. In speaking about the variety of his natural materials Goldsworthy states, ‘I think it’s incredibly brave to be working with flowers and leaves and petal. But I have to: I can’t edit the materials that I work with. My remit is to work with nature as a whole’<sup>520</sup>. For his more transient work Goldsworthy uses his bare hands or even his teeth, and often submerges himself into landscape, whether lying on slate in the rain or diving into a mud bath<sup>521</sup>. To capture this ephemeral state Goldsworthy often employs photography to capture the moment; he explains that ‘each

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<sup>517</sup> Tim Adams, “Natural talent”, *The Observer*: (London: 11 March 2011) ‘A lot of my work is like picking potatoes; you have to get in the rhythm of it’.

<sup>518</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy)

<sup>519</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy)

<sup>520</sup> Alastair Sooke, “He’s got the whole world in his hands”, *The Daily Telegraph*, (London, 24 March 2007).

<sup>521</sup> In *Icicle Star* Goldsworthy took delicate pieces of ice and joined them using his own saliva to compose an almost perfect star, to be captured on film before melting.

work grows, stays, decays – integral parts of a cycle which the photograph shows as its heights, marking the moment when the work is most alive. There is an intensity about a work at its peak that I hope is expressed in the image. Process and decay are implicit'<sup>522</sup>. On the other hand for his permanent sculptures like *Three Cairns*, *Moonlit Path* and *Chalk Stones* Goldsworthy also employs the use of machine tools [Pl. 121]<sup>523</sup>.

In conversation with John Fowles, Andy Goldsworthy was asked if he had 'any strong specific political or religious feelings,' to which he replied, 'No, though I am sympathetic towards the Green Movement's ecological concern. I belong to no Church'<sup>524</sup>. To explore the first of these issues, political feelings, it is evident that Goldsworthy does not adopt any formal political affiliation but takes on ecological issues in an individual and creative way. When asked by Terry Friedman about the importance of ecology in his thinking Goldsworthy replied, 'I have a very personal approach; it is not in a political sense. For me ecological issues are very creative ones. I have found this a very exciting time to live, in a way, because we are reassessing our relationship to the land. For me it is not just doom and gloom; it is also a sort of celebration. It is time when we can find a very personal way of establishing a relationship with the land'<sup>525</sup>. Therefore, it can be assumed that Goldsworthy will not sign up to the political creed of the Green Movement but wants to find a personal 'celebration' in the land rather than 'doom and gloom'. In the same way Goldsworthy may not want to sign up to any established Church creed; he

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<sup>522</sup> Channel Nine (Australia), 19 February 2006, "Andy Goldsworthy: Art of nature", accessed in January 2012 on <http://channelnine.ninemsn.com>.

<sup>523</sup> *Three Cairns* located in the USA; *Moonlit Path* is at Petworth, West Sussex and *Chalk Stones* is near West Dean, West Sussex.

<sup>524</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 161.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

does not make public statements on personal faith and is, indeed, often dismissive of such behaviour, but this does not mean that he does not have an intense spiritual relationship with the environment.

When Goldsworthy was asked what a 'good day' was the artist replied, 'I went to a pond, first time I have worked there. Found a beautiful dark sheltered corner, overhanging trees dropping leaves, floating. Struggled for about an hour, trying things out, trying to work the pond surface, floating out leaves, but I didn't want something that hid the pond. I tore holes in leaves, pond showing through, tore chestnut leaves. I tore every other section, leaf, water, leaf; dark, light ....I saw unlooked-for qualities: muddy pond bottom, thick with black rotting leaves. Wading stirred up black cloud surrounding the work'<sup>526</sup>. In the case of Goldsworthy his art is something deeply emotional as he wades through water, tears leaves and submerges himself in mud; this relationship that Goldsworthy has with the environment is something of the heart, the attempt to capture a moment in time like a latter-day Impressionist – it is something profoundly spiritual<sup>527</sup>.

Andy Goldsworthy might have turned his back on the religion of his parents (they were both strict Methodists) but he does concede that there is a spiritual purpose to his art. In an interview with Tim Adams, from *The Observer*, Goldsworthy expressed this spiritual purpose in the following terms, '...Everything has the energy of its making inside it...There is no doubt that the internal space of a rock or a tree is important to me. But when I get beneath the surface of things, these are

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>527</sup> E.g. *Twigs and Water* comprises twigs interconnected with one another creating a circle at the centre. The twig structure is then submerged in water.

not moments of mystery, they are moments of extraordinary clarity'<sup>528</sup>. Furthermore, this intense and deep spirituality with nature is expressed by Goldsworthy as a 'relationship' – a relationship with the land and the environment beneath the surface<sup>529</sup>. Therefore, we make the case that Goldsworthy works within a purely immanent theological framework where the material, the immediate and the contemporary relationship with the environment are all important. There is no reference to the transcendent and we will see in the following works of art that everything is transient, in so much as there is no allusion to past or future, no grand statements: everything is immediate.

#### 4.2.1 Holes and Cracks Beneath the Surface

In 2003, when the de Young Museum, San Francisco, commissioned Andy Goldsworthy to develop a site-specific work that took into account the local environment, Goldsworthy took his inspiration from the unique character of California's tectonic plates<sup>530</sup> [Pl. 122]. Working with the Appleton Greenmore stone imported from Yorkshire Goldsworthy created a continuous crack running north from the edge of the Music Concourse roadway in front of the museum, up the main walkway, into the exterior courtyard, and up to the main entrance door. Along its path, this crack bisects – and cleaves in two – large rough-hewn stone slabs that serve as seating for the museum. The cracks represent an opening up of the earth's surface, frequently experienced in California, to reveal the power and ravages of molten lava beneath. This opening up of the environment's surface is very common in Andy Goldsworthy's work.

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<sup>528</sup> Tim Adams, 'Natural Talent', *The Observer*, (London: 11 March 2007).

<sup>529</sup> Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 164.

<sup>530</sup> De Young Museum was founded as a Fine Arts Building in 1894: the contemporary building was designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron.

Holes play an important part in Goldsworthy's work as he explains: 'The underlying tension of a lot of my art is to try and look through the surface appearance of a thing. Inevitably, one-way of getting beneath the surface is to introduce a hole, a window into what lies below'<sup>531</sup>. In creating the hole the artist is inviting us into what lies beneath the surface and to look beyond our preconceptions. In *Rowan Leaves with Hole*, Goldsworthy creates concentric circles of leaves starting with orange and moving towards bright yellow. As the eye moves to look at the yellow leaves there is a deep black hole right in the centre. The hole invites further investigation – further enquiry into what lies below.

#### 4.2.2 Leaf Throws – Blairgowrie, Tayside – 3 January 1989

What is Unusual about the *Leaf Throws*' photographs, as with the *Hazel Stick Throws and Slate Throw*, is that the titles of the set of images include the place where the objects were thrown and the date [Pl. 123]. Therefore, the moment is captured when the leaves were thrown high into the sky with Goldsworthy's hands stretched almost heavenward like a charismatic worshiper in a moment of ecstasy. The four photographs that accompany the series reflect a moment captured and to be enjoyed, a moment that will pass as soon as the leaves return to the ground. The passing of time and the transience of nature is an important theme to Goldsworthy's work<sup>532</sup>.

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<sup>531</sup> [http://www.morning-earth.org/artistnaturalists/an\\_goldsworthy.html](http://www.morning-earth.org/artistnaturalists/an_goldsworthy.html). Goldsworthy places holes in a variety of contexts including the side of trees, in sand and on grassed banks. On occasions Goldsworthy climbs into the hole and photographs capture the artist peering from the earth below. On occasions Goldsworthy makes the hole look completely natural as in *Frosty Leaves Around a Hole at Birk Bank Quarry*.

<sup>532</sup> On occasions Goldsworthy captures a stick throw without himself in the photograph. An example of this is *Sticks in Cobweb*, Wales, May 1980.

### 4.2.3 Snowballs in Summer

The transience of nature was most explicitly seen when Goldsworthy rolled out thirteen monstrous snowballs, each weighing a ton, onto the streets of London in June 2000<sup>533</sup>[Pl. 124]. The snowballs were made in the Scottish countryside and placed in cold storage. The snowballs themselves were sited outside the entrance of the Barbican Centre to promote an exhibition by the artist called *Time*<sup>534</sup>. Both the exhibition itself and the snowballs drew attention to the passing of time and the transient state of the moment. As the snowballs melted they revealed materials collected from the Scottish countryside the previous winter including – Scottish pinecones, chalk, pebbles and Highland cow hair. Thereby, they promoted the beauty of the natural landscape in the context of the urban environment of London.

In trying to understand Goldsworthy's art it is important to bring together the three works of art discussed above. Andy Goldsworthy employs the use of natural materials as against the artificial, preferring saliva to glue and the natural colour of leaves to paint. To Goldsworthy this nature reflects the 'now' and very few of his works last but rather pass from existence and only a photograph records the moment. However, Goldsworthy does not want a 'hands off' approach to the landscape; he prefers to delve below the surface to discover the natural energy that he uncovers and in doing so he gazes at the natural world in sheer wonder. Goldsworthy rejects any thought of tyrannical control over nature but neither is he a passive observer; rather, he has a lightness of touch as he moves into identification with the natural world.

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<sup>533</sup> The snowballs on the streets of London repeated the *Snowballs in Summer*, Glasgow, 1989.

<sup>534</sup> *Time* was an exhibition and book about the passing of time where a sculpture of re-formed icicles is made expressly to catch the morning sunshine!

This enjoyment, before nature, which is also humble, is expressed in Goldsworthy's understanding of transience. He does not stand outside the transient state of nature but participates in its growth, change and decay. By stepping inside a created hole, which Goldsworthy often does, the artist enters into the acts of nature and recognizes that decay and mortality are as much his own as well as what he has created – an example is *The Void* [Pl. 125]. In the video *Rivers and Tides* Goldsworthy watches as a wave takes his work of art out to sea and comments, 'It is taken off into another place, into another world ...it doesn't feel like destruction.'<sup>535</sup> Therefore, as Goldsworthy accepts his place within the natural environment he also discovers another dimension in the very mud and earth that he delves into. There is always the possibility of the transcendent as Goldsworthy experiences the transient and we watch nature disappear before his eyes; in most instances, however, the artist deals with the here and now, the immanent theological framework, and not the somewhere else.

#### 4.3 Peter Howson

Peter Howson was born in London in 1958 and moved with his family to Prestwick, Ayrshire when he was four [Pl. 126]. Howson studied at the Glasgow School of Art from 1975–1977, and returned in 1979 to complete his Masters degree<sup>536</sup>. In 1985 he was made Artist in Residence at the University of St Andrews and also part-time tutor at Glasgow School of Art. In 1992 Howson was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to record the conflict in the former Yugoslavia

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<sup>535</sup> *Rivers and Tides* is a 2001 documentary directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer. Accessed <http://riversandtides.co.uk> in February 2012.

<sup>536</sup> At the Glasgow School of Art Peter Howson worked alongside contemporaries such as Adrian Wiszniewski, Steven Campbell and Ken Currie.

and was appointed the official British war artist for Bosnia in 1993<sup>537</sup>. Peter Howson has received a number of awards for his works including an honorary Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa), from the University of Strathclyde and was appointed an OBE in 2009. Howson has displayed his works around the world and has exhibited his paintings with the Flowers Gallery since the 1980s<sup>538</sup>; more recently Howson has completed a dramatic rendering of the martyrdom of St John Ogilvie for the renovated St Andrew's Cathedral in Glasgow<sup>539</sup> [Pl. 127].

Peter Howson is regarded as a leading figurative painter and his works have caught the attention of prominent cultural figures and celebrities<sup>540</sup>. Many of his paintings draw inspiration from the streets of Glasgow, where he was brought up. He is renowned for penetrating insight into the human condition and his heroic portrayals of the common man; Robert Heller describes his art as 'founded in Humanity, especially the human face'<sup>541</sup>. Howson suffered from bullying as a young boy and during a short stint in the army. He responded to this pain by pursuing hedonism. His experiences of abuse, whether self inflicted and substance related or from bullying have given him an affinity with those who are classed as somehow 'on the edge'. Howson's art has always reflected spiritual enquiry but in 2000, after a period of traumatic rehabilitation, he converted to Christianity<sup>542</sup>.

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<sup>537</sup> Howson spent a short time as an infantry soldier in the Royal Highland Fusiliers.

<sup>538</sup> Angela Flowers established her first gallery in 1970 in London's West End. There are now two galleries in London one in Hackney, the other on Cork Street. A third gallery has recently opened on Madison Avenue, New York.

<sup>539</sup> Saint John Ogilvie (1579–1615) was a Scottish Roman Catholic Jesuit martyr. On the 10 March 1615, aged thirty six, Ogilvie was paraded through the streets of Glasgow, then hanged and disembowelled at Glasgow Cross.

<sup>540</sup> David Bowie, Mick Jagger and Madonna all hold a private collection of Howson's paintings.

<sup>541</sup> Robert Heller, *Peter Howson*, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1993, 78.

<sup>542</sup> Peter Howson went through a programme of treatment for his alcoholism and drug addiction at the Castle Craig Hospital in Peebles, 2000.



Peter Howson captured the 'common man' in a series of paintings that stand out through the reconfiguration of the natural features of the human body to reflect the harsh realities of living on the Glasgow streets. These individual figures are brought together in what can be described as a 'mob' to demonstrate the 'bullies' that roam the underbelly of the Glasgow streets and cause havoc to the innocent. Finally, following Howson's conversion to Christianity, a more explicit religious imagery is included within the canvas, often placing the Christ figure into the very centre of the violent mob and on the streets of Glasgow that Howson knows so well. This strand of development in Howson's paintings will now be considered, demonstrating a contemporary example of a Scottish artist placing the Christ figure into a modern setting.

#### 4.3.1 The Heroic Dosser

*The Heroic Dosser* (1987) can be viewed as part of a series of paintings that are concerned with the 'common man' of Glasgow [Pl. 128]. Howson stated that 'the common man is in my work and will always be in my work' and this profound human concern can be seen in his paintings from 1987 onwards<sup>543</sup>. In *The Heroic Dosser* Peter Howson portrays a solitary figure from the meaner streets of Glasgow. The figure displays both dourness and strength and the face exhibits deep anguish. The canvas is large, over two meters square, and is dominated by the figure of the dosser. The face looks out of the painting with square features and steely grey hair and appears almost noble in character. However, nature has been bashed and dented by the years of anxiety and insecurity. The enormous hands of the dosser clasp to the railings and a large boot is thrust beneath the rail, but there seems to be no firm footing.

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<sup>543</sup> Heller, 27.

According to Donald Kuspit the painting has ‘enough of a hint of circumstance and context – an articulation of a world, however sketchy, to suggest a partial reason for his misery. That arises from a desperate isolation for which the anonymous, indifferent, barren city was responsible’<sup>544</sup>. The dossier would have been a person that Howson had actually seen in Glasgow and to that extent there is realism in his paintings but at the same time they have a non-realist identity. Kuspit makes this point when he argues that, ‘as with Van Gogh’s figures in general and Picasso’s Blue Period figures, Howson’s figures are living allegories of human suffering’<sup>545</sup>. At his heart Peter Howson is a narrative painter and what removes his work from simple realism is the element of story telling.

*The Heroic Dossier* was a real person who wandered the streets of Glasgow between 1985–87 and in his painting Peter Howson wants to create a narrative. Strong narratives run through much of Peter Howson’s art and this is captured in a series of what Howson referred to as the ‘Apocalyptic Triptychs’. The titles are *The Scottish Trilogy*, *The Wild Hunt* and *The Stairway to Heaven*. *The Stairway to Heaven*, or as Howson now prefers to call it *The Three Faces of Eve*, comprise three works of extraordinary imagery and rich resonance. The work was inspired by a recent visit to a New York nightclub where he saw a girl who was in with a bad crowd and was obviously being abused. Mariana Vaizey captures the moment by writing, ‘Howson noticed a very young woman, thin, possibly, indeed probably on drugs, already worn out and

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<sup>544</sup> Donald Kuspit is an American art critic and professor of art history and philosophy at the State University of New York.

<sup>545</sup> Donald Burton Kuspit, *Fables and Fantasies*, Duke University Museum of Art, USA, 1988.

translucent, with an older man: lover, keeper, minder, pimp?’<sup>546</sup> The triptych, set in both New York and Glasgow, captures the story of the woman from her childhood, to womanhood and finally death. The narrative takes the young girl from her seaside childhood, to the nightclub setting and to the final scene in a Glasgow graveyard with a view over the city. The juxtaposition that Howson creates from the innocence of the young girl peering over the harbour wall to the haggard woman in the graveyard is quite unnerving. In both paintings the female character has long flowing red hair but it is the features on the face that betray the lost potential for life. It is in the portrayal of the face that Howson captures the harshness and brutality of life in the underworld of Glasgow.

#### 4.3.2 Death of Innocence

In 1989 Peter Howson painted the *Death of Innocence* that depicts the *Heroic Dosser* strung up on a wooden beam [Pl. 130]. The Dosser is surrounded by an angry mob with four fascists saluting the crucified man. Three of the saluters wear white sunhats, like a fourth man, who is thrusting a thick-lipped face toward the victim. The angry mob making fascist gestures is common to many of Howson’s paintings. Among the several on this theme, *Patriots* (1991) stands out [Pl. 131]. The painting presents the figures from an angry mob with raw power: three grotesquely violent, charging, leaping hulks, no less animal than their snarling ferocious dogs. This and similar paintings pick up this major theme: of neo-Nazis, fascists, bully boys and racists of any kind; people who commonly use brute force to brute ends. The title *Death of*

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<sup>546</sup> Marina Vaizey is an art critic based in the United Kingdom. She was the art critic for the *The Financial* and *The Sunday Times* and editor of the *Art Quarterly and Review*. Vaizey has also been a judge for the Turner Prize.

Marina Vaizey, *Peter Howson: Painting and Prints*, catalogue, Glasgow Print Studio, 1990.

*Innocence* probably refers to Howson's own growing understanding that in the end the innocents of the world, the sensitive people, will be destroyed by the bully boys. This growth of understanding works on two levels: first it draws directly on Howson's experiences from the streets of Glasgow and second Howson's growth of comprehension is leading him to make such social statements.

As a young boy Howson developed an interest in art in order to develop an alternative world into which he could retreat when the reality of school became intolerable. He was constantly bullied at school and the psychological effects were to be longlasting. Howson recalls, 'I was frightened even to go into school at one point; I'd have my lunch money taken off me, steel combs held to my throat and would be called every name under the sun – just because I was quiet and liked to stay inside at break-time doing my art....it had a big effect on me.'<sup>547</sup> One incident seems to have stood out more than any other and is a recurrent theme in Howson's art. One day Howson was on the beach with a friend when a bunch of bullies approached, took his companion and tied him upside down on a lamppost. As well as exploring his own experiences of growing up in Glasgow, Howson also wants to educate an audience to the realities of violence in society.

The *Patriot* paintings and those depicting violent mobs often create a figurative caricature that is both mocking and establishes a sense of fear. The pose of the men is often hunched slightly forward, fists powerfully clenched and with an expression full of hate. His painting *St George* (1989) captures the expression well: white peaked cap displaying the Union flag, aggressive, pig-eyed pose and a bulging neck conveying a

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<sup>547</sup> Heller, 10.

sense of physical, but not mental, strength [Pl. 132]. In capturing these figures of fun and hate Howson is making a clear social criticism of Scotland, if not the rest of the United Kingdom. As he explains in his own words, 'I really want people to try and look at the whole nature of Britain, and the way we are. Violence is, alas, endemic below the surface of both men and the masses; and nobody can argue that these are imaginary figures from nightmares or that the nightmares and demons don't require exorcising'<sup>548</sup>. The exorcising of these demons weighed heavily upon Howson and throughout much of his artistic life he suffered from depression and addiction to drugs and alcohol. During a period of rehabilitation in 2000 Peter Howson, in his own words 'committed his life to Christ'. This new found faith helped him to turn his back on his addictions and gave him a new direction in his art. The figure of Christ, especially the crucified Christ, would henceforth constantly appear in his art – now Christ would become the victim of the bullying.

#### 4.3.3 Harrowing of Hell

In 2007 Howson completed his painting *Harrowing of Hell*. It abounds with allusions, many to the artist's own direct experience and inner turmoil [Pl. 133]. An event that was significant in the harrowing of Peter Howson's personal hell took place in 2000 during an extended period of drug rehabilitation. It was during this time of rehabilitation that Howson says that he 'converted to Christianity'. It is not that Howson had not shown an interest in the spiritual before this period of conversion; at the age of six he painted a crucifixion scene, but it was during this period that Howson made a 'personal conviction' and felt the 'presence of God'.

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<sup>548</sup> Heller, 53.

Howson, in his own words, describes a significant period of prayer and the feeling that the 'old skin was shed'<sup>549</sup>. During this period of prayer, which took place over a number of weeks, Howson describes a vision, a presence and a voice that exclaimed, 'you're loved, you're cured and you will never drink or take drugs again'<sup>550</sup>. After this intense period of conversion Peter Howson explicitly places the image of Christ in his art and into the contemporary setting of Glasgow.

In the *Harrowing of Hell* (2007) we once again see the Dosser. He is ruined and ragged, clutching a bottle in his hand, but there is hope in his eyes as he gazes on the crucified Christ. The Dosser is one of many pitiful figures in the scene, which includes a naked girl whose arms are tied behind her back; her eyes are closed but they are straining towards the light. This terrifying scene is mostly composed of muscular armed men. A white haired and bearded man holds a lance and pierces the side of Christ.

Christ is the central figure in a scene and the composition is built around him. The stature of Jesus is small and central but it is illuminated in such a way that the eye is drawn to the crucified posture. In his descent to the incarcerated hell Jesus is no longer actually nailed to the cross but his figure is still twisted into the position of crucifixion. To his left is a lit staircase, which presumably rises to heaven. Here Howson is surely making a commentary on the people he has met on the streets of Glasgow, acknowledging and empathising with the living hell that they experience and showing that true hope comes in the form of the crucified Christ.

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<sup>549</sup> In the work of art *The Third Step* Howson captures what must be a self portrait where a man, looking up at a crucifix situated over the entrance of a church, has literally shed his skin.

<sup>550</sup> BBC 2, Art Works Scotland, *The Madness of Peter Howson*, [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00w57gt](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00w57gt)

The scene from the *Harrowing of Hell* does not directly allude to the physical streets of Glasgow as other paintings of the period do. *The Everlasting Man* (2008) depicts an almost medieval crucifixion scene located possibly in the more run down areas of Glasgow<sup>551</sup> [Pl.134]. In the centre of the painting is a traditional crucifixion scene with Christ in the middle and the two thieves either side. There is a large crowd gathered around the three crosses. To the top left hand side of the painting there are tower blocks rising above the brutal scene below. To the right of the painting is a dilapidated house with a single wall and two windows. If one peers through one of the windows one sees buildings and high-rise blocks that are on fire and the sky has turned red. The figures around the crucifixion recall earlier pieces of work in a seedy nightclub where a single figure is surrounded by a sinister and menacing crowd. This time the 'mob' mingles in the foreground with the soldiers, with one of the soldiers clinging to a red robe, possibly belonging to Christ.

In both the *Harrowing of Hell* and *The Everlasting Man* the cruciformed figure of Christ takes a prominent position in the canvas. However, in neither of these paintings do we observe an historical event but rather the drama is being performed in the modern and contemporary Glasgow and among the people who inhabit the city. Howson is working predominantly within an immanent framework of theology in that the artist's observation comes from the very human society he observes – with all its brutality. The figure of Christ, therefore, derives from the experiences of Glasgow and overall makes a social commentary on that area of Scotland. This does not mean that there are opportunities for transcendence in Howson's art: his conversion experience and the hint of medievalism in the crucifixion scenes certainly take us in that direction.

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<sup>551</sup> The title *The Everlasting Man* was taken from a book by G.K. Chesterton of the same name (1925).

However, overall there is a dominance of wanting to work in and through human society in Howson's art, which places his theology into a predominantly immanent frame of reference. Overall Howson believes that the figure of Christ is not only an educating but also a socially redeeming figure that offers the opportunity for hope.



## Conclusion

Where and how do we meet God in our world today? Those questions can be understood in quite different ways as we try to grapple with the contemporary theological framework in which we live. Is God in another place high above us, or is He very close to us, existing within the fabric of our every day surroundings? Within the framework of these two possibilities, the words we use to describe our understanding of God are never quite adequate, or alternatively perhaps both possibilities are true. However, are they true in equal measure and, more importantly for our enquiry, has this balance changed over time? By considering the lives and works of four Scottish painters from Victorian and modern-day Britain, this thesis has shown the complexities of the transcendent and immanent frameworks in relation to specific artists but also to the periods through which they lived. By way of conclusion, I shall tentatively draw out a possible interpretation of a more general theological trajectory. I shall suggest that there is a move away from a Victorian tendency to seek solace in a transcendent God, to a modern day concern to believe in the divine entering the material order and transforming it. Of course, this is not universal but it does seem to be discernible in the Scottish context. At the very least, this would seem to be the broader implication one can draw from the kind of art produced by the four artists examined.

As I suggested in Chapter 2, the Christian faith was important to William McTaggart. He was born into a Christian family, both his parents were active members of the Free Church, he served as an Elder and we are told that right to the end of his life the Bible was the book McTaggart knew and loved the best<sup>552</sup>. We also discovered that McTaggart had mixed emotions towards the institutional Church that denigrated his

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<sup>552</sup> Caw, *McTaggart*, 3.

paintings as the 'devil's trade'<sup>553</sup>. It is therefore no surprise that McTaggart refrains from painting overtly religious art but sought instead to discover the divine in the landscapes and seascapes of Scotland, a place for which he had deep affection. At first sight, it might seem then, that McTaggart's art is informed more by a theology of immanence rather than transcendence. Things however, are not that straightforward.

Although it is true that McTaggart captured something of the present reality in his work *The Past and the Present*, the painting quickly directs us somewhere else. The old crumbling church orients us to the past while the girl at the centre peering out of the painting wants to transport us to an idealised future<sup>554</sup>. Similarly, although *Spring* strongly seems to suggest immanence as the landscape is painted in minute detail, his letters indicate that, implanted in his mind is an idealised landscape that never quite existed in his own environment. McTaggart never quite faced up to the grim realities of the urban and industrial landscape that overlooked his home in Broomieknowe<sup>555</sup>. Rather McTaggart wished to take both himself and by implication the viewer to another place, to a romanticised view of rustic life as a pastoral ideal.

As we come to the Scottish artist's most celebrated piece *The Storm*, we witness a work in which McTaggart had truly immersed himself as he battled against the elements of the troubled weather and created a canvas outside. It is a painting where the natural forces take over the human drama and nature overwhelms the small figures in the

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<sup>553</sup> Caw, McTaggart, 7. The local minister dismissed painting as a 'dravelin trade' and 'spoke to his mother of art as vanity and even wickedness, and pointed to its connection with the Church of Rome, which dragged Italy down until it was a land of fiddlers and painters and such irreligious folk'.

<sup>554</sup> At this time McTaggart's paintings were influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement and in particular the work of John Everett Millais. In *The Past and the Present* McTaggart creates a juxtaposition between childhood and the suggestion of death that compares with Millais' *Autumn Leaves*.

<sup>555</sup> Whilst painting at Broomieknowe McTaggart was selective with the local landscape that he chose to paint. For instance the artist did not depict the industrial aspects of the area, such as the nearby quarry or carpet factory.

canvas. *The Storm*, therefore, has all the possibilities of a theological engagement with immanence, but we need to tread carefully. No storm could compare to the sheer scale of McTaggart's *The Storm*; rather the storm existed in the imagination of the Scottish artist's mind<sup>556</sup>. The picture suggests a move from an immanent theological framework towards transcendence in as much as the subject of the storm is caught through the imagination of the Scottish artist, who reconstructs its meaning. *The Storm* could represent the inner turmoil that McTaggart faced in his own life, and also reflect the tensions that existed in Victorian society with the crumbling away of received patterns of belief.

If *The Storm* represents the inner turmoil in McTaggart's life then *Moss Roses* and *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn*<sup>557</sup> represents a time of permanence and stability. Both of these portraits were painted during a more settled period of the Scottish artist's life whilst he was living at his new family home at Broomieknowe. In his work of art *Consider the Lilies*, McTaggart moved through a time of transformation, where he replaced the anxieties of life (as outlined above) with the intention of unearthing aspects of Scottish history that were personally important.<sup>558</sup> The *Emigrant* and *St Columba* series of paintings speak both of intense moments of loss and of the hope of something gained. The *Emigrant* paintings capture a time in the distant past where the Highlands were cleared and many of McTaggart's kinsfolk sailed for distant shores<sup>559</sup>.

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<sup>556</sup> Although *The Storm* does depict human drama, the viewer feels less involved and is effectively distanced from the subject matter – looking down from a height at the scene below. As the viewer surveys the painting the effects of nature and the human drama are more generalised; the work appears to be a summation of personal experience.

<sup>557</sup> *Moss Roses* was concluded and signed in 1890. The painting portrays the artist's second wife and eldest daughter Mysie. *Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn* was finished in 1892 and is a self-portrait.

<sup>558</sup> In the early part of the decade McTaggart's son, Willie was lost at sea and in the mid-1890s the artist suffered from a 'serious illness' which the doctors diagnosed as Bright's disease. Caw, *McTaggart*, 134.

<sup>559</sup> We are told by Caw that the whole episode of emigration and Highland Clearances 'haunted' McTaggart. Caw, *McTaggart*, 169.

The *Columba* paintings represent a moment of arrival where the divine comes to the shores of Scotland and places himself in the historic and cultural life of the nation<sup>560</sup>. Both sets of canvases point to a yearning for an idealised past and moments of transcendence in Scottish history.

Therefore, one might expect that McTaggart with his intense relationship with his own landscape would quite easily move towards a position of immanence but he does not; rather, he develops his art in a world dominated by transcendence. It would appear that the depth of Christian inheritance, both within the Scottish artist's family circumstances and the wider society, was sufficient to allow McTaggart to imagine a reconstructed world that moved beyond the immanent that was found in the material and observable.

By contrast, this kind of imagination, which takes the viewer away from material reality, does not seem to appeal to the modern-day Scottish artist, Andy Goldsworthy. The artistic endeavour for Goldsworthy is not to move from the immediate environment to a more transcendent world, but to delve into the very present natural surroundings<sup>561</sup>. Therefore, Goldsworthy relishes the prospect of feeling and touching the soil; he explores the crevices and holes that he finds in nature. To Goldsworthy the transient moment is to be enjoyed in a present where leaves are thrown and snow melts<sup>562</sup>. If there is something spiritual taking place for Goldsworthy, it is found in the contemporary and very immanent relationship with nature. The prospect of the divine residing in another place is quite simply not part of the artist's worldview.

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<sup>560</sup> The idea that the Christian saint came to Scotland was something to celebrate for McTaggart, he wrote, 'The great fact was not that Columba landed in Iona, but that he came to Scotland'. Caw, *McTaggart*, 172.

<sup>561</sup> Goldsworthy is a sculptor who 'works directly with the land and uses materials found in landscape', [www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/andy-goldsworthy).

<sup>562</sup> Examples include: *Leaf Trows, Blairgowrie, 3 January 1989* and *Snowballs in Summer*.

Goldsworthy's approach to his art may have a lot to offer the viewer who interprets his art through a belief in the divine. Arguably it takes seriously that God shows himself in our everyday surroundings, as the Father did vicariously through Christ<sup>563</sup> and the Holy Spirit<sup>564</sup>. For the believer, Goldsworthy's world presents the divine that is manifested in the material where the spiritual permeates the mundane, God is near<sup>565</sup>. Andy Goldsworthy's art allows the opportunity to participate with the divine in nature through its continuous cycles of growth, change and decay. The throwing of leaves or the melting of snowballs in the summer allows the believer to partake in the divine experience in the moment not in the distant past or in another place.

One might question why Goldsworthy does not contemplate the possibility of transcendence. The answer may be in the reduced influence of organised religion in his life. It has been noted that Goldsworthy's parents were committed Christians but there is no evidence that the artist stayed with this faith at least through regular church attendance. Also, as we have suggested, the wider British society does not seem to support the possibilities of transcendence in an environment where religion becomes a matter of choice (and not a very attractive one) and Christian nominalism is arguably the norm.

As we now turn our attention to a comparison between William Dyce and Peter Howson, we are studying two factors: on the one hand, the apparent theological move from the dominance of transcendence to the primacy of immanence, and on the other the unique contribution of these two artists to our discussion. William Dyce, as we have seen, was a

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<sup>563</sup> Philippians 2:6-8

<sup>564</sup> Luke 3:22

<sup>565</sup> 'In Christ all things hold together...', Colossians 1:17.

High Anglican who intended to enter holy orders on completing his medical studies. Although William never entered the priesthood, he regarded it as his vocation to educate the people of Britain in the ways of the Christian faith through art, music and architecture. What is noteworthy for our discussion was how Dyce proceeded to do just this.

William Dyce was an educated Victorian polymath who had come to a reasoned position on belief in a divinely ordered system, which he then found had to be protected in the face of the gradual crumbling of traditional patterns of belief. Therefore, right from the outset Dyce was able to find the divine in tradition: it appears, then, that he was content to contemplate another world while allowing modern science to investigate this one. To be more specific with regard to this discussion, Dyce believed that art could be employed to convey moral and religious meaning, and the Scottish artist was able to locate this meaning in the past.

We discovered that the Nazarene community influenced Dyce, that this community was concerned with the revival of medieval art and that William was a dominant figure in influencing the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to return to medievalism<sup>566</sup>. Dyce did not look only towards the medieval period for inspiration but also admired the Anglican church of the seventeenth century with her ordered services and religious music<sup>567</sup>. Both examples illustrate that Dyce looked towards the past to find Christian meaning but this view carried negative consequences. Many in Victorian society, including Charles Dickens, who regarded this

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<sup>566</sup> Baron Bunsen introduced William Dyce to Overbeck and the community of the Nazarenes. Dyce initially acted as a grandee to the Pre-Raphaelite movement providing a link to the German community.

<sup>567</sup> William, in 1843, published *The Order of Daily Service* and in doing so returned to Merbecke's communion service to provide a lasting tradition of Anglican liturgical music. Dyce adapted the conventions of Latin plain chant to create a satisfactory arrangement for chanting psalms in English. A year later, in 1844, William had set the Scottish communion service to music and started the Motett Society.

religious outlook as medieval, Catholic and regressive, condemned this as yearning for a golden age<sup>568</sup>.

Dyce's early paintings, including *Omnia Vanitas* and *Jacob and Rachel*, may be examples of art appearing as a straightforward sermon<sup>569</sup>. However, as Dyce became more influenced by the ideals of naturalism championed by John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, we see a greater concern for the contemporary as reflected in nature. Therefore, in *Titian Preparing to Make his First Essay in Colouring*, Dyce was making the statement that he was rejecting a purist ideal for a naturalist one<sup>570</sup>. So as this summary moves towards a consideration of Dyce's religious art we have to be careful to balance both the ideals that William was trying to hold on to which were to paint a very contemporary setting whilst at the same time to bring religious meaning from the past into the present.

*Gethsemane*, *The Man of Sorrows* and *David* are all examples of Dyce's art where an historic image of Christ has strayed onto a contemporary piece of natural art. However, it is possibly in the painting *The Good Shepherd* that we witness more acutely this juxtaposition between the ancient and the modern. The landscape surrounding Jesus consists of a modern farm building in the distance, a feeding trough fixed around a dead tree, and a pen secured by a modern fence. The countryside would not look out of place in most parts of nineteenth-century rural

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<sup>568</sup> In *Pictures from Italy* Dickens extols the virtues of science, modernity and national pride over what he saw as the regressive, medieval and Catholic. Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1846), 352, accessed on September 2010 on <http://www.archive.org/stream/picturesfromital00dickrich>.

<sup>569</sup> In *Omnia Vanitas* we have a Magdalene who needs to make a decision: will she be a saint or a sinner – will she live the life of a penitent or will she continue in her previous profession? We can almost hear the sermon being preached at the figure; in the light of all our earthly desires and lusts – *all is vanity!*

<sup>570</sup> Ruskin highlights the painting *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* as the only picture in the exhibition 'quite up to the high-water mark of Pre-Raphaelitism'. John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin* ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, (London: George Allen, 1909), Vol. 14, 98.

Britain. The only figure that does not quite capture the mood of the mid-Victorian rural landscape is Jesus. Christ is wearing a long flowing robe and displays a bare left foot; his beard is cut short but his hair is loose down the back of his neck. Therefore, the landscape is modern, the parable biblical, and the image of Jesus medieval.

In summary therefore, William Dyce's primary concern was to educate people, through art, in the Christian faith. Dyce did not intend merely to replicate past masters: he wished to speak to a contemporary world. However, Dyce did not primarily seek God in the modern world; he found Him in the golden periods of the past (in medieval or seventeenth century Anglicanism) and wanted that particular historic vision of the religious faith to speak to his modern world. Therefore, it would be more appropriate, from a theological perspective, to state that William Dyce emphasised transcendence over and above immanence, in that the Scottish Episcopal artist tried to find God in history or Catholic tradition.

By contrast, if we turn to the contemporary Scottish artist, Peter Howson, the approach and emphasis are very different. The paintings of Peter Howson derive inspiration from the streets of Glasgow, where he was brought up. He is renowned for his penetrating insight into the human condition and his heroic portrayals of the common man<sup>571</sup>. Therefore, *The Heroic Dosser* and *The Three Faces of Eve* both tell the stories of tragic human figures that are drawn out of Howson's first-hand experiences of the gritty reality of living with the violence found in his hometown. In the same way, Howson's experience of the divine is

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<sup>571</sup> *The Heroic Dosser* (1987) can be viewed as part of a series of paintings that are concerned with the 'common man' of Glasgow. Howson stated that 'the common man is in my work and will always be my work' and this profound human concern can be seen in his paintings from 1987 onwards, Heller, 27.



derived from the streets of Glasgow, and from his personal suffering of drug abuse and violent exploitation which, in turn, led the Scottish artist to crisis and conversion. Consequently, when Howson paints the *Harrowing of Hell*, Christ emerges from the common humanity he came to serve rather than representing a being imposed on the scene from a historic or other idealised setting. The stature of Jesus is small and central but is illuminated in such a way that the eye is drawn to the crucified posture. Jesus is no longer on the cross in his descent to the incarcerated victims of hell but rather there is a lit staircase, which presumably rises to heaven. Howson is surely making a commentary on the people he has met on the streets of Glasgow, acknowledging and empathising with the living hell that they experience and showing that true hope comes in the form of the crucified Christ. Therefore, Howson does not seek the divine in another place or a time in history; the sacred emerges from the brutality of the people and the mean streets of Glasgow where the artist lived. In the works of art of Peter Howson, we arguably see a greater emphasis upon immanence rather than transcendence.

In both comparisons between the paintings from the Victorian period with the works from our contemporary setting, we witness a theological shift from a location where the ideas of transcendence were not only possible but were also very much part of the normal experiences of a religious person to one where the contemplation of transcendence seems very much at odds with the modern attitude. It would make more sense in the contemporary world then, to create a theological framework that takes seriously the elements of nature and human society, highlighting the importance of the search by many for spiritual meaning

in the fabric of the multiple facets of current life. These facets might include sport, popular culture or the natural world<sup>572</sup>.

If, as I have suggested, there has been a general shift in theological sensibility from the nineteenth to twentieth and twenty-first century Britain from a privileging of the transcendent as, otherness, the subjective and mystery, to the normative dominance of the immanent, as the rational, objective and observable, this requires some sustained theological engagement and reflection. One of the main questions that needs to be answered with regards to Christian theology is this: does the transition from transcendence to immanence create within the individual Christian a sense of loss; if that is the case, does the contemporary situation need challenging? With regards to loss, does this tendency to eliminate the transcendent lead to a believer's neglect of, and scepticism towards, many aspects of his or her faith such as the efficacy of intercessory prayer or the presence of Christ in the mass?

For the Christian, the problem of overcoming the apparent divide that emerges between what is felt to be real and tangible, and what is perceived to be mysterious and other, is at the centre of what it means to grow in faith. How can it be that the Word could become flesh at the Incarnation – that the infinite being of God could be confined within the limits of a baby born in a manger? In the same way that the Christian theologian has the task of making sense of the Incarnation then it should be the task of theology to bridge the gap between the material and mystery, between the body and the soul.

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<sup>572</sup> For example, David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

This task becomes ever more important in the context of the modern world. Alasdair MacIntyre recognises this separation as part of the human condition in the modern world when he writes:

'Any contemporary attempt to envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity .....encounters two different kinds of obstacle, one social and one philosophical. The social obstacles derive from the way in which modernity partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behaviour. So work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal...The philosophical obstacles derive from two distinct tendencies ....first the tendency to think atomistically about human action and analyse complex actions and transactions in terms of social components.....and second.....when a sharp separation is made either between the individual and the roles that he or she plays....or between the different roles - and quasi-role enactments of an individual life so that life comes to appear as a series of unconnected episodes<sup>573</sup>.

Religion should stand in opposition then, to this modern tendency to partition unconnected episodes in life. To be a Christian requires that every aspect of life is touched by the calling to follow the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There should be no requirement to separate the material from the spirit or, in the case of our discussion, to make a choice between the need for both immanence and transcendence.

So, we come to the question of why there has been a loss of transcendence and in what ways the religious person might respond. McTaggart, as a Christian artist, expresses his imagination and theology through a landscape art based in his homeland, Scotland; Howson, on the other hand upon converting to the Christian religion, wishes to express that faith on canvas. Dyce appears to be the most successful in uniting

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<sup>573</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1981), 190.

both a sense of otherness and the immediate because he strives to bring together both transcendence and immanence. He does this by taking seriously his study of the contemporary world both through observation and after studying new scientific discoveries. Therefore, in creating a contemporary setting, he wishes the divine to come and speak; he explicitly wishes to connect the modern with the Christ to whom he is committed. An example of this would be *Gethsemane*. In the framework of the biblical narrative Dyce takes the Christ of his faith, who is beyond the limitations of physical existence, and places him in the contemporary setting of the Aberdeenshire countryside.

By contrast, Andy Goldsworthy's work is problematic from a Christian Incarnational perspective. In the end, although Goldsworthy draws us to the physical realities of snowballs or holes in the ground, he arguably fails to provide a meaningful context in which to interpret them. He offers no explicit motivation, meaning or inspiration. Goldsworthy suggests that his work hints at the spiritual but he also feels a need to distance himself from the kind of faith practised by his parents. Goldsworthy describes his work as transient, but it does not inspire us, in any direct way, to make an ecological response to the industrial exploitation, and destruction, of our planet.

In the modern world, people are looking for inspiration and searching for meaning in life. In the past, for many meaning and value were found in religion, and faith inspired many to effort and sacrifice. However, according to Jacques Barzun, the realm that religion once occupied has now been taken over by art. According to Barzun, the agenda was to re-imagine the spiritual ambitions of the nineteenth century artist by placing them once again in this world on earth. Barzun writes:

It required the Renaissance glorification of man, the scattering and weakening of creeds by the Protestant Reformation, and the general unbelief caused by the progress of science, before art and artists could achieve their present position in the world of intellect. The goal and spur of religion had to be withdrawn from the other world to this world<sup>574</sup>.

Some of these references by Barzun may appear misleading, but they do reflect a strand of philosophy that claims that the rise of art coincided with the decline in religion. As Nietzsche famously put it:

Art raises its head where religions decline. It takes over a number of feelings and mood produced by religion, clasps them to its heart, and then itself becomes deeper, more soulful, so that it is able to communicate exaltation and enthusiasm which it could not do before....Growing enlightenment has shaken the dogmas of religion and generated a thorough mistrust of it; therefore feeling forced out of the religious sphere by enlightenment, throws itself into art<sup>575</sup>.

Others in the nineteenth century also affirmed that religion would decline and that the arts would replace its sphere of influence. For example, Matthew Arnold wrote:

More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry<sup>576</sup>.

However, Barzun does give a glimmer of hope to the Christian task when he quotes Vincent van Gogh: 'To try to understand the real significance of

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<sup>574</sup> Jacques Barzun, *The Use and Abuse of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 17.

<sup>575</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy (trans)* (London: Penguin, 1886/1993), 43.

<sup>576</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: First and Second Series* (London: J. M. Dent, 1884/1964), 132.

what the great artists, the serious masters, tell us in their masterpieces, that leads to God; one man wrote or told it in a book; another, in a picture....'<sup>577</sup>. For the Christian theologian, therefore, surely art should be subservient to faith and not the other way round. Returning to Goldsworthy, therefore, is it perhaps possible to contemplate his art and search for the redeemable in the light of a Christian theological vocation in today's world?

Chapter 4 situated modern Britain as torn between a tendency to assert a dominant secularism that marginalises Christian faith, and the residue of implicit Christian beliefs in the wider population, that are not necessarily expressed by church attendance; the 'believing without belonging'. From the perspective of theology and aesthetics, this has implications for how we view the art works we have discussed, particularly those which are not ostensibly 'Christian'. Barzun, Nietzsche and Arnold appear to claim that art in itself can displace religion and become the idol from which we seek motivation, meaning and inspiration. On the other hand, works of art which are not explicitly 'Christian', (and this is especially evident with Goldsworthy) may reveal the sacred and the work of an immanent God in the world, as we have seen.

An important task for the contemporary theologian, then, is to highlight the redeemable qualities in such art, and show how it provides a particular kind of opportunity for a person to be led to God, even if that was never the real intention of the artist, nor the viewer. For example, in the specific case of Goldsworthy, the idea of transience can be linked to the natural vocation of humanity that is highlighted in the prayers on Ash

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<sup>577</sup> Barzun, *The Use and Abuse of Art*, 33.

Wednesday, 'from dust you have come, to dust you shall return, repent and return to Christ'. In this way, those things that initially may appear to privilege only immanence could also lead, through the Incarnation in Christ, to the transcendent. This opens up new possibilities of otherness and mystery.

## Works Consulted

### Primary Sources Consulted

The McTaggart Family Papers were given to the National Library of Scotland (NLS) and are now held in the Manuscript Department. The papers provided an invaluable source for understanding the life of the Scottish artist and, substantiating what others have written about McTaggart. The Inventory for McTaggart in the NLS is divided into three parts: Correspondence, Miscellaneous Papers and Printed Materials. The letters, although difficult to read, give a first hand account of correspondence between McTaggart and his patron (Robert Craig) for example. There is also formal documentation including birth and marriage certificates press cuttings. The letters quoted in the thesis are:

146 NLS (Acc. 11157/2), 15<sup>th</sup> January 1852.

159 NLS (Acc. 11157/2) 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1851.

182 NLS (Acc. 11157/5), 29<sup>th</sup> September 1859.

189 NLS (MS 6351/3-4), 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1861.

The Dyce Papers are located in Aberdeen Art Gallery. The papers themselves are transcripts of the life, correspondence and writings of William Dyce by his son James Stirling Dyce. The collection adds up to what is, in effect, an unpublished biography by his son; contained within the collection are transcribed letters: the Roman Numerals represent Chapters in the unpublished book. The original manuscripts are no longer extant (a microfiche copy is lodged in the Tate Gallery Archive). The letters quoted in this thesis are:

329 Dyce Papers I, N. Wiseman to Dyce, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1834.

326 Dyce Papers II, W. Dyce to P. Davidson, 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1835.

336 Dyce Papers XII, W. Dyce to W. E. Gladstone, 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1843.

338 Dyce Papers XV, W.E. Gladstone to W. Dyce, 19<sup>th</sup> April. 1843.

409 Dyce Papers XVII, Dyce's son states that 'by 1855 William had begun to use stimulants in order to support his sinking energies'.

335 Dyce Papers XXII, C.R. Cockerell to W. Dyce, 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1846.

406 D.P. XXVII, W. Dyce to Eastlake, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1848.

310 Dyce Papers XXVIII, Dyce to Jane Brand, 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1849.

374 Dyce Papers XXXIII Eastlake to W. Dyce, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1853.



375 Dyce Papers XXXIII, W. Dyce to W.E. Gladstone, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1853,

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